THE

LAWS and LIBERTIES

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GOSPEL:

OR, THE

DUTIES and PRIVILEGES

Common to all

CHRISTIANS,

Explained and Recommended in feveral

Practical Discourses.

DESIGNED

To promote Christian Truth and Charity, Peace and Unity.

By GILBERT MICHELL, M. A. Rector of Bredfall, near Derby.

LONDON

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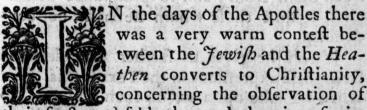
DISCOURSE I.

God the only Lawgiver in the Affairs of Religion and Salvation.

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St. JAMES iv. 12.

There is one Lawgiver, who is able to fave, and to destroy: Who art thou that judgest another?



their feasts and sabbaths, and the rite of cir-

They who had been educated in the law of Moses contended zealously not only for the retaining of these usages, among those of their own nation, but they strove to impose them

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2 God the only Langiver in the Affairs

upon others also, as necessary to be observ'd together with the laws and precepts of the

Gospel.

THE Gentile Christians sinding no such things injoin'd by Christ, and being encourag'd by Christ's Apostles too, maintain'd their Christian liberty, and resused to submit themselves

1-3,6°c. to such a bondage.

This exasperated the judaizing Christians to such an high degree, that they pronounc'd all those incapable of salvation who neglected these Mosaic rites and ceremonies; declaring peremptorily, That except they were circum-

be saved.

St. James reproves them in this text for that uncharitable censure of their brethren; intimating to us, That it is a most unbecoming and presumptuous arrogance, to require those observances upon pain of damnation, which God by Christ hath not commanded; to lay burdens upon mens shoulders, which he hath freed them from; and to pronounce destruction against those whom he hath not condemned.

What he gives us farther to understand from these expressions in the Text is this, That when we take upon us, on such accounts, to judge the hearts and consciences of our Fellow-Christians, it is an impious usurpation of Christ's authority. — There are none, besides him, who can prescribe laws to the consciences of his subjects; because he only is invested with this power, who is able to save, or

to destroy their souls. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save, and to destroy: Who art thou that judgest another?

THE most material considerations upon the text may be reduced to the following Propo-

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or to First, THERE is one who hath just authority to make laws for the government of our consciences.

Secondly, HE hath power to fave and to

destroy.

Thirdly, THERE are none besides him who have any such authority. And therefore,

Fourthly, No other persons ought to judge, censure, or punish their Fellow-Christians, for matters purely relating to their souls and consciences.

First, THERE is one who hath just authority to make laws for the government of our consciences.

THAT there is such a power somewhere, all they who live in expectation of a future judgment must, and do acknowledge; and that it is originally in God, the author and governor of the world. But as the text is particularly address'd to Christians, I shall shew, That the power and authority to enact laws, whereby to bind the souls and consciences of Christians, is given by God to Jesus Christ; and that be is to us the one Lawgiver, who, in the exercise of God's authority, is

God the only Lawgiver in the Affairs

able to fave and to destroy; for thus, in another place, we are expressy told to the same purpose, One is your master, even Christ. He is our only Rabbi, our master and instructor, to whom only we owe an absolute submission in spiritual concerns; and in the words of the Text, Our only Lawgiver.

This will appear evident beyond contradiction, if we confider either the nature of those laws which he hath given us; or the sanctions by which he hath enforc'd them; or the plenitude of that commission which he received from God his Father, from whom originally this power was derived.

1. THE nature of his laws and precepts shews, that they are such as principally concern the heart and conscience; as will evidently appear, from the whole tenor of the Gospel; and especially from Christ's famous sermon on the mount.

THE first thing there recommended to his followers is, Poverty of spirit; or such an humbleness and lowliness of mind, as is not apt to be puffed up with worldly pomp and greatness; nor bent upon the acquisition of earthly treasures.

OF the like nature are most of those which follow: Such is that religious mourning for the general defects of human nature, for our own particular infirmities, and for our past offences against God.

SUCH is that meekness and gentleness of mind, which makes us to receive with awful veneration the divine commands, and to acquiesce

4

Mat. xxiii. 8, quiesce in all the distributions of God's providence towards us; which makes us chearfully to comply with all the lawful commands of our superiors; and renders our behaviour yielding and complaisant towards our equals; courteous and condescending to those below us; and not eafily nor mightily provok'd by reproof, or contradiction.

Such also is that hunger and thirst after righteousness which is there prescribed. It is an earnest inclination of the heart to advance. as much as lies in us, Christ's kingdom here on earth, and to participate of its glories in a the nature of those laws wh

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Such, again, is that kind and merciful disposition there injoin'd; - and such is that purity and fincerity of heart, which intitles us to the beatific vision.

UNDER the same denomination come the prohibitions against causeless anger, and lustful inclinations days of a security later a

OF the same internal, spiritual nature, are all those admirable precepts of Christianity, which command us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbour as our felves; — to forgive our enemies from our hearts; and to fet our affections upon things above. And,

In the same rank we are to place the three principal conditions on our parts, for the fulfilling the covenant of the Gospel, faith, repentance, and fincere obedience to the laws

of God, and Christ.

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God the only Lawgiver in the Affairs

ALL which injunctions and commands, as we may plainly see, are laid upon us by Christ our lawgiver, for the regulation of our hearts

and consciences, subust had proceed and to

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WHOEVER are subject to the will of Christ, by a sincere obedience to these, and the like precepts and commands, they constitute his invisible church or kingdom here on earth, — and they shall inherit his everlasting kingdom of joy and triumph in heaven above.

2. THAT Christ is a legislator to the consciences of his disciples, appears not only from the nature of those laws which he hath given us, but also from the sanctions by which they

are enforc'd upon us.

THE rewards and penalties are of the same nature with the laws themselves. The rewards which he hath promised to the faithful and obedient are joy and peace, and spiritual consolations; the favour of God in the refreshment of our souls; the eternal enjoyment of our Maker's love; the kingdom of heaven, crowns of glory, and the like.

THE punishments are such also as will afflict the soul with horrors and despairings, with bitter anguish and regret, with a just and pungent sense of our unworthiness and ingratitude, and all the dreadful consequences of God's wrath and vengeance, which by our sin and disobedience we have wilfully

pulled down upon our heads.

3. This authority of Christ over the consciences of his subjects, may be further pro-

ved

ved from the plenitude of that commission which he received from God.

Northing could be more extensive than that commission was which God the Father gave to his beloved, to his only begotten Son. St. John iii. John tells us, That he had the Spirit of God 34, 35. without measure: That the Father loved him, and gave all things into his hand. And St. Paul fays, It pleased the Father, that in Col. i. bim should all fulness dwell. He himself com-19. forted his disciples, when he was about to leave them, by telling them, that nothing could be too great for them to expect or hope for from him, by reason of that unbounded power and authority, which the Father gave unto him : All things that the Father hath are John xvi. mine. And after his refurrection he gave 15. them a full and final confirmation of it; for, as St. Matthew tells us, Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Matt. me in heaven and in earth. Then God set him Eph. i.20, at his own right hand in the heavenly places; Epn. 1.2 far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named; not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And bath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church.

I MIGHT have produced a great many other places of Scripture to convince us of his unlimited authority, not only over us, but even over the whole creation; feeing, By him all things confist. Who was before all Col. i. 17. things. Who in the beginning laid the foun-

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dations

dations of the earth; and the heavens are the work of his hands. For he made not only Col.i. 16 the bodies and the fouls of men; but by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: All things were created by him, and for him.

THESE passages need no more than a bare repetition of them, to convince any rational person, who believes the Scripture, of Christ's empire and dominion over the souls and consciences of men, to which therefore he hath an undoubted right to prescribe what laws and precepts he judges proper and convenient.

I proceed therefore to shew,

Secondly, THAT Christ being thus invested with God's authority, hath power to fave,

and to destroy.

This proposition is consequentially made good by what hath been said upon the former. But there are other arguments more directly tending to prove, that the authority of this our lawgiver extends to the salvation and destruction of our souls. This power may justly be ascribed to him, as he is authorized to enact those laws upon which our salvation and damnation doth depend; to secure the observation of them by the sanctions of suture happiness and misery; and by his final sentence to acquit the innocent, and condemn the guilty.

1. He may very properly be faid to be able to fave, and to destroy our fouls, who hath just

just authority to enact those laws upon which salvation and damnation doth depend. Now,

We must either own that he hath this authority, or we must judge him an impostor; for this he hath expressly challenged to himfelf, and to the doctrine he commanded his apostles to preach to every creature. He that Mark xvi. believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; He 16. that believeth not, shall be damned. To the same purpose, in his prayer to God for himfelf and his disciples, he says, As thou hast John xvii. given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him, viz. all those who sincerely believe and obey the Gospel. And this is life eternal, that they Ver. 3, might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

He had said as much before in his discourses with the Jews, when he spake of his doctrine under the metaphor of bread, coming John vidown from heaven, and giving life unto the 33 world. But that they might not be staggered at this high claim, he tells them in the same place, I came down from heaven, not to Ver. 38. do mine own will, but the will of him that sent

me.

To this God himself hath given testimony, not only by the mighty miracles he enabled him to work, by raising him from the dead, and by the powerful operations of his Holy Spirit with the disciples, in confirmation of their master's doctrine; but more than once by a voice from heaven.

AFTER this manner God bare witness to him in the river fordan, in the hearing of John baptist. Then there came a voice from Luke iii. heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. Or, as it is related Mark i. by St. Matthew with a little variation, This Matt. iii. is my beloved Son; in whom I am well pleased.

The like divine testimony was given from heaven, at his transfiguration on the mount. Then also there came a voice out of the cloud, Luke ix. saying, This is my beloved Son; hear him, i. e. not only hearken to, but acquiesce in him,

and hence forward pay obedience to his laws, as the complete and final declaration of my will to men.

At this wonderful transaction there were present on the mount with him, besides his three disciples, Moses and Elias, who seem to have been sent on purpose to resign up their authority to him; and to confess that the antient law, which the former, as God's minister had proclaimed; and the other, as the chief of all succeeding prophets had restored, was now to be abolished; as having had its final accomplishment in Christ, who be-

Heb. v. 9. its final accomplishment in Christ, who being made perfect, is now become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

THAT Christ hath such authority cannot be denied, unless we shall deny it also to belong to the most high God, since it is demonstrable that the supreme God hath vested this authority in him. God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake in time past unto

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days spoken unto us by bis Son.

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The communication of all things relating to the salvation of Christians is thus expressed by St. Paul: One Lord Jesus Christ, by 1 Cor. whom are all things, reveal'd to us from the viii. 6. one God, even the Father, of whom are all things. And much to the same purpose by St. John, This is the record, that God hath gi-1 John v. ven to us eternal life: And this life is in his 11, 12. Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son hath not life.

By this we may understand, tho' we own submission, and all grateful and dutiful obedience both to God and Christ, in the great affair of our salvation; yet still there is but one Lawgiver; the authority of God the Father being to this end communicated by him to his Son Christ Jesus. And thus he is able to save and to destroy, as he is duly authorized by Almighty God to enact those laws upon which our salvation and damnation doth

depend. This appears further,

2. That he hath just authority to secure the observation of his laws by the sanctions of future happiness or misery. No laws can signify any thing towards keeping those in due subjection for whom they are enacted, unless they are well fenced, and guarded by proper sanctions. The rewards and penalties annexed to the observance, or non-observance of all such laws as are duly made and ratisfied, are what we call the sanctions of those laws. And it is by virtue of those sanctions that the legi-

legislators can expect to see their laws and statutes duly put in execution. But none can be esteem'd as proper fanctions of the laws, excepting such only as follow certainly upon the obedience or disobedience of the subject. Neither will this be sufficient of it self, unless they are so considerable as to over-ba-

lance all temptations to disobedience.

If we consider Christ our lawgiver, we shall find that he hath rais'd such mighty ramparts about his laws, as are not to be slighted; inevitable destruction will fall upon the heads of those who have the boldness to despise them. The sanctions by which he hath enforc'd his laws, are such as will infallibly sollow according as they are either neglected or observ'd. It shall not be in the power of men or devils to defeat them. The faithful and obedient shall assuredly be crowned with glory and immortality. The wicked and rebellious shall be thrown down into hell, where the worm of conscience dieth not, and Mat. xxv the fire is not quenched. These shall go away

into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.

THESE are the strongest sanctions which can possibly be thought on. They are infinitely superior to all other hopes and sears; and therefore they are every way answerable to the end intended by them. And as these are the most powerful engagements to obey his laws, by reason of the vast importance of them, on supposition that they must necessarily follow upon our behaviour; so also when

when we consider what infallible assurances we have of the certainty of these rewards and punishments, then they will have their full weight upon our consciences. And therefore, that they may not want any thing of

their utmost force, I shall shew,

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3. That God hath not only given to the Lord Christ a full power to make such laws, and to guard them with such impregnable securities; but, moreover, to see his own laws put in execution, and by his final sentence to acquit the righteous and condemn the guilty. This will be clear beyond exception, if we prove, that the same who is now our legislator shall hereaster be our judge. And this also is contain'd in the text before us; for in many of the oldest manuscripts, and in the Latin and other most ancient versions, the words are expressed; There is one lawgiver and judge, which is probably the true reading.

In other places the facred writings are plain enough in this particular, God bath appoint- Acts xvii. ed a day in which he will judge the world, by 31-that man whom he bath ordained, whereof he bath given assurance unto all men, in that he bath raised him from the dead. We must all 2 Cor. appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that v. 10. every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he bath done, whether it be good or bad. God bath put all things in Heb. ii. subjection under his feet. All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth. For the Fa-John v. ther judgeth no man, but bath committed all 22, 23.

judg-

35, 36.

judgment unto the Son; that all men should bonour the Son, even as they bonour the Father. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all John iii. things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son bath everlasting life: And be that believetb not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath

of God abideth on bim.

THESE proofs are abundantly sufficient to prove Christ's just authority to make laws for the government of our consciences; and that he is indued with power, both to fave, and to destroy, not only the bodies, but even the

fouls of men. Now therefore,

SINCE Christ is the only lawgiver, who hath just authority to make laws for the government of our consciences, and that he is indued with power both to fave and to destroy, there is good reason that all persons, to whom his laws have been made known, should take especial care, that they do not wilfully violate those laws; for of this they

2 Theff. i. may be well affured, that, The Lord Jesus 7, &c. shall be revealed from Heaven, with his mighty angels, taking vengeance of them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who therefore shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

As this affurance is exceeding terrible to the wicked, fo it is highly confolatory to the righteous; who may suffer hardships for the

2 Tim. ii. sake of Christ and his religion. It is a faithful saying, if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also

reign

reign with him: If we deny him, he will also

deny us.

What hath been said concerning the sanctions of Christ's laws, and his power to see them put in execution, may serve to shew, That human laws can never bind the consciences of men, by any sanctions in the legislator's power. No encouragements or discouragements within the power of mortal men, can be so infallibly applied, as that they shall be sure to reach the soul and conscience.

Princes may promise the honours and glories of the world, to make a man profess, what, perhaps, his conscience tells him, is a salse or irreligious doctrine; or to deny a doctrine, the truth of which he is inwardly convinc'd of. But what signifies the possession of all the glories of the world, to one who seels continually the severe and terrible reproofs of his guilty conscience?

On the other hand, they may apply all the engines of terror to as little purpose; for when all is done, the threaten'd pains may be escaped, the joys and glories never be obtain'd. God can rescue the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor, and cause the hope of hypo-

crites to perish.

THE foul is not capable of being held to its duty by any hopes or fears, excepting such only as can affect it in a suture state. But neither the miseries, nor glories of suturity, are in the disposal of any earthly governor, and therefore it is not in their power to lay

fouls of men.

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THE mightiest potentates upon earth have been often disappointed in their rage, when they attempted to enslave the consciences of those, who, in their temporal concerns had neither will, nor power to resist them. And some of those who have been tempted by a tyrant's threats or promises to sin against their consciences, have paid very dear for such prevarication, by the smart of those wounds which they have thus given to their consciences. On the other hand,

MANY martyrs and confessors have bid defiance to the haughtiest tyrants, tho' they were armed with the utmost force of human terrors. Ecclesiastical history will furnish us with a noble army of those, who have rejoiced and triumphed in the midst of torments; and with long catalogues of hypocrites and apostates, who sunk under the oppression of their own own guilt, too great to be sustain'd

by any temporal supports. Now,

If there be but one lawgiver to the Christian church, and that one is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the last great prophet whom God hath sent into the world to publish those edicts, upon which our salvation finally depends; and if he hath made no laws, but those which are contain'd in the writings of the New Testament, then this we may be well assured of, that whatever is not found in that only code of Christian laws cannot oblige the conscience of any Christian by its own di-

rect authority. In this respect he is a subject of none but this one great lawgiver; and whoever claims any spiritual dominion over him, must be look'd upon as an usurper upon Christ's authority.

CHRIST's laws are all recorded in the facred volume. To this therefore let us all willingly repair, for the knowledge of our duty; there we shall most truly be informed, What is the good, and acceptable, and perfect Rom. xift Will of God. There it is, That the grace of Tit. ii. God, that bringeth salvation, bath appeared ii, 12. unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that bleffed bope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ.



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DISCOURSE II.

God the only Lawgiver in the Affairs of Religion and Salvation.

St. JAMES iv. 12.

There is one Lawgiver, who is able to fave, and to destroy: Who art thou that judgest another?



O dissuade the Jewish converts from censuring and condemning their Fellow-Christians of the Heathen nations, for neglecting some things by them thought

necessary to salvation, though they are not required by the Gospel, St. James offers this argument, That by so doing they did in effect assume unto themselves a jurisdiction to which they had no title; and, without the powers requisite thereunto, did presume to make

make laws for the government of men's con's sciences; and all this in contempt of that authority which was vested in another, who alone is duly qualified and authorized to that purpose. There is one lawgiver, who is able to fave, and to destroy: Who art thou that judgest another?

THE substance of this argument is contain-

ed in these four propositions:

First, THERE is one who hath just authority to make laws for the government of our consciences.

Secondly, HE hath power to fave and to destroy.

Thirdly, THERE are none besides him who have any fuch authority. And therefore,

Fourthly, No other persons ought to judge, censure, or punish their Fellow-Christians, for matters purely relating to their fouls and consciences.

I HAVE proved, That Jesus Christ is to us Christians that one lawgiver, from the nature of his laws, they being such as principally concern the heart and conscience; from the fanctions by which he hath enforc'd the obfervation of them, viz. The rewards and penalties which he hath allotted to the obedient or disobedient in a future life; and from the plenitude of that commission which he received from God, who hath made bim the head over all things to the church.

I HAVE proved also, Secondly, That being thus invested with God's authority, he is able to fave and to destroy. He hath authority to

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enact those laws upon which our salvation and damnation doth depend; to enforce the observation of them by future happiness or misery; and to pronounce the final sentence, by which we shall either stand acquitted or condemned. And having now so sully cleared his title to such a legislative power, and explained at large how duly qualified he is for that office, I shall shew,

Thirdly, THAT there are none besides him

who have any fuch authority.

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IF ever such a power was lodged in any men, it must have been in those persons whom he chose for his apostles, and indued with power from above. But to convince us, that they neither had, nor pretended to any such authority, we find one, who was not inserior to the chief of the apostles, utterly disclaiming it; and declaring himself to be accursed, and rejected from the blessings of the Christian covenant, if he should dare to assume to himself this

Gal. i. 8. privilege. Tho' we, or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached, let him be accursed.

This declaration he repeats with great earver. 9. nestness in the next Verse; As we said before,

nestness in the next Verse; As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed. He proceeds immediately to explain himself most fully to our present purpose, by expresly renouncing all human authority in matters of salvation; protesting

plainly,

plainly, that the doctrine which he taught was that, and that only, which he received from Christ himself. I certify you, brethren, Gal. i. that the Gospel which was preached of me, is 11, 12, not after man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In the largest commission which Christ gave to his disciples, when they were sent to propagate the Gospel throughout all nations, their authority is expressly limited to such commands as they had before received from him; Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing Matt, them, &c. teaching them to observe all things xxviii. 20. what soever I have commanded you.

CHRIST is declared to be not only the au-Heb, xii, thor, but also the finisher of our faith. But2. if any thing necessary to the faith of Christians can be added to that which Christ himfelf hath taught us, then Christ cannot be truly faid to have finished or perfected the terms of our salvation. But he hath left no necessary thing unfinished, for he was in all things faithful to him that appointed him. And Chap. iii. this man, because he continueth for ever, bath2. an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is Chap. vii. able to fave them to the uttermost that come un-25. to God by him. It is he only who hath the key of David: It is he that openeth (the kingdom of heaven) and no one shutteth: And Rev.iii.7. shutteth, and no one openeth.

It is a vain presumption for any men to take upon them to prescribe laws, where they have not any power to put them in execution. But no bodies or societies of men, whether

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frates, no princes nor potentates upon earth, were ever yet invested with such a power, as

to force obedience from the heart.

Our bodies and estates, our lives and liberties, may be brought under the subjection of human governments. The public good of fociety in general demands no less. But our fouls and consciences can never be enslaved against our wills; here all the arts and stratagems of human wisdom fail; here all the engines of worldly policies are applied in vain. Our bodily powers may be disarmed, and all external actions hinder'd, but the affections and defires of the foul are placed beyond the reach of any mortal powers what foever; riches and preferments, dignities and honours, cannot change them; fines and confiscations, banishments and imprisonments, racks and tortures, cannot force them. Now,

WHAT can be more weak and abfurd, than to pretend to give out laws and edicts, where there is not any compulsive power to enforce them; where there is no possibility, either of compelling men to that which is injoin'd them, or of restraining them from that which

they forbid? But,

IT is even yet more vain and fruitless, more foolish and ridiculous, to give out laws for the regulation of mens behaviour, in those cases, where the rectitude, or obliquity of their behaviour, cannot possibly be discerned. But no mortal, fallible creature, hath a capacity to look into the affairs and trans-

transactions of our hearts and souls: These are known only to the searcher of all hearts; he only can discover what passes there in secret, and therefore it is he only who hath any power to enact laws whereby to bind our souls and consciences.

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This power being communicated to Jesus Christ by his God and Father, and no such privilege allowed to any other, it is evident that no other besides himself is qualified to pass a judgment on our hearts, and consequently can claim any legislative power over them *.

If the text before us be allowed to be the word of God, it must convince any impartial and judicious person, that the power of giving laws to conscience can belong to none but Christ alone. St. James tells us, There is one lawgiver; and by so saying he tells us in effect, that there is but one. But,

What sense would it have been, to tell us, that there is one lawgiver, if at the same time that he speaks in this manner we are to believe indeed, that there are ten thousand such? And that every age and country, where the Gospel should be planted, would abound with many?

If any one conceits that this expression, There is one lawgiver, is not strictly to be taken, as excluding all but one only, the following words, who is able to save, and to de-

^{*} Non unum è multis, vel præ cæteris : sed exclusivè unum, hoc est unicum. Sanders. de oblig. consc. Prælect. 4.

stroy, must put it out of all dispute, that no one can have any right to claim this privilege, unless he dares to challenge to him-felf the power of salvation and damnation too.

So abfurd is the pretence, so blasphemous is the claim, of making laws to conscience; and therefore I hope, what remains to be considered in the last place, will appear a very just and rational proposition, viz.

Fourthly, THAT no persons ought to judge, censure, or punish their Fellow-Christians, for matters purely relating to their souls and consciences.

It having been proved in this discourse, That it is not in the power of men to lay any direct obligation upon the consciences of their sellow-creatures, because they can have no compulsive power over them, and are not qualified so much as to discern what passes in them; it may therefore be objected,

To what purpose do we exhort men, to sorbear what we know they have no power to do? If it be impossible for them to exercise any such dominion, what need we trouble our selves to dissuade them from it? This objection, I know, may possibly be made against the way of arguing here made use of. But,

I Must observe in answer to it, That it cannot be a fault in any one, to argue against a thing, merely because it is impossible, as long as there are great numbers of those who

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ho re, are, some of 'em, so weak and thoughtless, as to judge it possible; and others so wicked and irreligious, as to claim and endeavour to execute it.

Is it not a charitable and christian office (if there were nothing more in it) to set men free from their mistakes, and rectify their judgments? And while there are many so unthinking, as to attempt impracticable things, it is neither unreasonable nor impertinent in others, to dissuade them from their vain and fruitless undertaking.

PERFECT happiness is never to be met with in the pursuit of worldly treasure; and yet how many persons are so vain and inconsiderate as to expect it there? Now shall a Christian, who is truly sensible of this mistake of theirs, and therefore strives to convince them of it, be censured as ridiculous and impertinent, for this his charitable office?

THE thing is true in fact, that none are capable of making any laws, which, by virtue of their authority, can bind the consciences of men. They are, in reality, no more capable of doing this, than they are of laying obligations upon the inhabitants of the planetary worlds, if there be any such. And yet this false notion, that some persons may have a just authority to prescribe laws for the consciences of others, hath possessed a great many in several ages of the world; and there are great numbers who do still continue in the same missake.

This error hath been very fatal to the peace of Christendom; encouraging some to exercise a cruel tyranny over their Fellow-Christians, and terrifying others with many doubts and scruples about the safety of their condition, when their private judgments dictate one thing to them, and the commands of their superiors do most strictly require of them to profess another.

WE may confidently affirm, that the Fewish converts in the days of the Apostles, had no more power to impose any laws upon the consciences of their Gentile brethren, or to judge infallibly of their behaviour, or to prejudice their falvation by any censures which they passed upon them, than we now have.

St. JAMES was not infensible of this; and intimates as much, by faying, There is one lawgiver, who is able to fave, and to destroy. Yet notwithstanding this, he thought it neceffary to reprove them for fpeaking and acting fo, as if they had authority to be judges and legislators in that case. If therefore St. James was not inconsistent with him-Rom. xiv. felf, in the place before us; nor St. Paul, in 4, 10, 12, several passages to the same purpose, how

13, &c.

then can we be justly blamed, who do but follow their directions, or examples, in admonishing our Fellow-Christians to forbear the like attempts, though we are firmly perfuaded that it is not in their power to effect what they defign.

THE vain opinion of such a sovereignty is not only very false, but very dangerous and

destructive too. It hath been the occasion of many troubles and confusions in several parts of Christendom. - It is the very root and principle from whence all bloody perfecutions take their rife. - It is the argument by which the persecuting church of Rome endeavours to justify her courts of inquisition; and the inhuman butcheries and maffacres, which she hath so often cherished and fomented, to the great dishonour of the Christian name.

This authority hath been claim'd by feveral popish councils, under a vain pretence, that it is derived immediately from God and Jesus Christ; and we know too well the fatal consequence of such an usurpation. This affords a sufficient reason to oppose the notion with our utmost zeal.

To assume dominion over conscience is the highest act of facrilegious usurpation. It is an insolent attempt to divest our Lord and Saviour Christ of that authority, which in a most peculiar manner doth belong to him: He only is able to fave and to destroy the foul, and therefore it is he alone who hath any power to make laws and statutes for the regu-

lation of it *.

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In fubmitting to fuch an usurpation of God's prerogative we are guilty of rebellion against his sovereignty and supremacy over our fouls; but God is a jealous God, and will

^{*} Prædator est gloriæ Dei, et potestatis ei debitæ nefarius inyasor, quisquis in conscientias hominum aut sibi jus arrogat aut dominatum exercet. Sanderf. de oblig. confc. Prælect. 4.

not suffer his honour to be given to any other *. If therefore any persons upon earth shall compel us to pay them that submission which is due to God alone, we ought boldly to assert our Christian liberty, and remember what our Saviour said upon that occasion; I say unto you, my friends, Be not asraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But

Luke xii. Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.

CHRIST hath admonished all inferiors, never to submit to the claims of them, who insolently challenge his authority; and all superiors, that they do not, upon any pretences whatsoever, presume to take it to themselves.

Matt. xxiii. 8, 9.

BE ye not called Rabbi: For one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. This is his command to all superiors. And then immediately he gives a caution to all inferiors, That they call no man father upon earth, i.e. that they suffer no man to govern their consciences with like authority as earthly fathers rule their children, in things belonging to their proper jurisdiction.

WHOEVER, under pretence of extraordinary zeal for God's honour, shall presume to

^{*} Quin et illos quoq; qui conscientias suas, quæ soli Deo absolutè subesse debent, ullius creaturæ potestati ita subjiciunt, ut ex illius arbitrio toti pendeant, cautos velim, Sanderson, ubi supra.

fet up any rules and modes of worship, as universally obligatory to all Christians; or publish and require their affent and consent to any speculative notions, not plainly and expressy mention'd in the Gospel, as equally necessary to be observ'd, believ'd and practis'd, with the precepts and injunctions of Christ and his Apostles, under the conduct and direction of the Holy Spirit; they, whoever they may be, who shall dare thus to impose these things upon their brethren, must incur the heavy censure of our Lord, passed upon the Pharises, In vain do they worship me, Matt. teaching for doctrines the commandments of xv. 9-men.

CHRIST'S chosen Apostles were very tender in this point; always carefully distinguishing between the divine commands, and those things which they delivered as their own advices only, or prudential counsels given to the faithful. Thus the great St. Paul, I speak this by permission, and not of command-1 Cor. ment. And again, in the same chapter, This vii. 6. I speak for your own prosit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that you may attend upon the Lord without distraction.

As none but Christ hath authority to give laws to conscience, so none besides him, or his Apostles, guided by his Spirit, have any right to impose their own interpretations of his laws, as of necessity to be received by others; for this is, in effect, to make themselves the lawgivers. And if we allow this

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privilege to any men, we put it in their power wholly to evacuate the laws of Christ, and to set aside the Gospel, and to establish a new teligion, in direct contradiction to it.

This the Papists have actually done, in several very material instances; by assuming to themselves an authority to put what sense they please upon the Scripture, to be absolutely received as truth, though it may appear ever so contrary to the plain meaning of the words, according to the apprehensions of private persons, after a full, judicious, and most impartial examination into the sense and meaning of them. It becomes us therefore, as we value the liberty which we happily obtain'd by the Reformation from the tyranny and superstitions of the church of Rome, streunously to oppose these enslaving principles.

As we are subject to Christ alone, in the affairs of conscience and salvation, let us be careful that we do not revolt from our allegiance to him, by subjecting our consciences to any other lawgivers. As it is be only who is able to save and to destroy our souls, so let us keep them always in immediate subjection

to bim alone.

Usurpers are generally noted to be tyrants; but no tyranny was ever so grievous to be borne, no dominion ever exercised with so much cruelty and barbarity, as by those who have intruded themselves into the government of Christ's kingdom.

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THERE they, who have not the least shadow of any just authority, do not only take upon them to make laws for the government of mens consciences; but, after the manner of other tyrants and usurpers, they impose harder laws than those which Christ hath given us to observe; and shew no mercy to those who will not pay an absolute submission to their tyrannical impositions.

In Jesus Christ we have a most gracious lawgiver, and merciful High-priest, who is touch'd with the feeling of our infirmities. In Heb. iv. matters of faith, he will pass by the unavoid-15-able errors of our understandings: in matters of practical duty, he will accept of our impersect obedience. And, provided always, that there be in us a willing mind, it shall be 2 Cor. accepted according to that a man hath, and not viii. 12. according to that he bath not.

Though he be able both to fave and to destroy, yet he delighteth not in the destruction, but earnestly desireth the happiness and salvation of all his subjects and servants.

The things reprehended in the judaizing Christians by St. James, were those damnatory judgments which they passed upon the Gentile converts, on account of their non-observance of certain days and meats, circumcision, and such like rites and ceremonies, some of which had been commanded and authorized by God himself. Much more therefore are they to be reproved, who pass a decretory sentence of damnation upon their Fel-

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low-Christians, for disbelieving, or neglecting such things, as never were commanded by God at all, either in the Law, or in the Gospel; and are no other than mere human inventions and institutions. But,

Rom. xiv. Let not any of us presume thus to judge,

or set at nought our brother, seeing we shall
all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.

1 Cor. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until
iv. 5. the Lord come, who will both bring to light the
hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the bearts: And then shall
Ephes. every man have praise of God. To him be gloiii. 21. ry in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all

ages, world without end. Amen.

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DISCOURSE III.

The Authority of the Church, in Matters of Religion, is merely instructive.

St. MATTH. xxiii. 2, 3.

The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moles seat. All therefore what soever they bid you observe, that observe and do.



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> NE of the most popular and prevailing prejudices against our Saviour and his doctrine was, that he intended to fet afide the law of Moses; that he secretly

undermined the authority of the elders, and feduced the people from all obedience to their governors.

THE Scribes and Pharifees were the principal contrivers of these malicious calumnies; and they used their utmost art and industry to

make

make them swallowed by the multitude. The most plausible slander they could invent, to shake his reputation with the zealous Fews, was, to represent him as a person who had an absolute contempt for all the sacred ordinances to which they had been used of old; and that he had nothing less in his intention, than to subvert their whole oeconomy, both in

church and flate.

HE was therefore very careful both by his actions and discourses, to clear himself from fuch a heavy imputation. He complied with all the legal rites and ceremonies; he kept up a regular communion with the Jewish church; he gave his attendance in the temple and the synagogues; he went up to 7erusalem at the times appointed; and celebrated the passover according to the law: He chearfully paid his tribute to the civil magistrate; and submitted to every lawful ordinance of man.

17, &c.

WHEN he opened unto the people the fum and substance of his religion, he sufficiently declared his approbation of the moral law. Matt. v. Think not, faid he, that I am come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. For verily I say unto you, till beaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wife pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men fo, be shall be called least in the kingdom of beaven, i. e. he shall never enter there. But whofoever shall do, and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of beaven.

THIS,

This, however, he never intended should be understood of the ritual and ceremonial, but only of the moral duties which were therein contain'd. For thus he afterwards explain'd himself: In the subsequent branches of that discourse he insisted upon nothing but what was truly and strictly such; and at other times he declared his meaning fully to the same purpose: All what soever ye would Matt. that men should do unto you, do ye even so to vii. 12. them; for this is the law and the prophets. Again, speaking of the two chiefest and most comprehensive duties prescribed in the law of Moses, the love of God, and of our neighbour, he told his hearers, On these two Chap. commandments bang all the law and the pro-xxii. 404

As for the law of positive commands, and carnal ordinances, he knew they were only burdens imposed upon the Jews till the time of reformation; and he intended nothing less, than to blot out the hand-writing of these ordinances, and intirely to abolish them by his death. But the time being not yet fully come for the final termination of them, he gave commandment to his disciples, that herein they should be guided by the direction

of their governors.

HE had, indeed, utter'd some severe expressions against the corrupt opinions, and vile practices of the Scribes and Pharisees. In the two preceding chapters we have a particular account of some warm contests between him and them. But it was far from his in-

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tention, in thus exposing them, to detract, in any measure, from that submission and regard which the people justly owed to their

superiors.

To obviate all misconstructions which might possibly be drawn from such of his discourses as were expressly levell'd against the pride and hypocrify, the false and pernicious doctrines of these professors, he spake to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses seat. All therefore what soever they bid you observe, that observe and do.

This precept of obedience, thus delivered to the people, is founded upon a certain argument here mentioned, as a motive to enforce it: So that before we can fully understand the obligation of the precept, it is necessary that we clearly apprehend the argument from

whence it is inferr'd.

To fet this matter therefore in a proper light, I shall, First, Inquire into the nature of the argument here made use of by our blessed Saviour.

This will pave the way, Secondly, To find out the true meaning of the precept; and to discover the mistake of those perfons, who build several precarious and false notions upon this divine precept.

First, I SHALL inquire into the nature of the argument. It is contain'd in these words, The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses seat.

THAT to fit in the chair or feat of Mofes implies in it some kind of authority or jurisdiction, is a matter, as far as I perceive, not much disputed among the learned. But whether this be meant only of a civil, or of an ecclefiaftical authority; or whether both forts are contain'd under that expression, this, I think, is not so generally agreed upon.

In order to discover then more plainly what it is, it will not be improper to look back, and fee what that authority and jurifdiction was, which Moses himself, the author and founder of it, was invested with. In this inquiry the Scripture only is to be our guide. Let us therefore see what the Scripture hath delivered concerning that authority which Moses bore over the children of Israel. There we shall find that he was, by a special commission derived from God, their leader and captain, their prince and ruler, their judge and lawgiver; and in a word, that he had both a civil and ecclefiastical jurisdiction.

This is a point so indisputably clear, and capable of being proved from so many pasfages in the Bible, and particularly from the history of his actions, which we have at large in the book of Exodus, that I shall not trouble you to produce the proofs. I shall rather prefume, that every one is fufficiently convinc'd of what St. Stephen told his persecutors, at the time of his martyrdom; that God Acts vii. did send bim to be a ruler and a deliverer, by 35. the hands of the angel which appeared to him in

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38 The Authority of the Church, in Matters

Acts vii. the bush. And that he received from God himself the lively oracles which he gave unto

them. But however,

ALL this was but a deputative and vicarial authority; it was that of a servant only, not that of a lord or supreme governor, either in spirituals or temporals. His power was far from being despotic over the people; he could be no more than God's viceroy, or the chief steward in his houshold.

THEY were then under a theocracy; God himself being then as a prince and ruler to his people; so that Moses did not presume to impose any thing upon them, either as to faith or practice, but what was immediately dictated and prescribed by their supreme Lord and

King *.

HE professed only to promulgate the laws and statutes of their God, and demanded their allegiance and sidelity to the divine Majesty,

not to himself by virtue of any sovereignty or dominion he could claim over them. And,

THAT they might not be either ignorant, or unmindful to whose laws their obedience Exod.xix. was required, they were all summoned together. ther at the foot of the mountain, where the Chap. xx. Lord descended down in fire and spoke, and with a loud voice pronounc'd the ten commandments in the hearing of the whole multitude.

Τούτε μέν εν τη θείε νόμε διάκον Τεγμίη αι Μωσής.

^{*} Νομοθέτην έχομεν τον όντως θεόν. Theoph. Antiochen. ad Autolyc. lib. 3. p. 217.

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In the administration of the government, upon his humble request, God was pleased to join with Moses seventy men of the elders of Is-Nnmb. xi, rael, and to indue them with the same spirit that was upon him, to enable them to bear the burden of the people with him, besides the chiefs of the twelve tribes, whom he had Exod. before called to his assistance, by the advice of his father Jethro.

THE ecclesiastical jurisdiction was also communicated from him, by the express command of God himself, to Aaron and his de-Lev. viii. scendants in the tribe of Levi. These God Chap. x. appointed to teach the children of Israel all 8, &c. the statutes which he had delivered unto them

by the hand of Mojes.

From all which it evidently appears, that Moses himself had no other than a delegated authority both in civil and ecclesiastical assauth fairs; and that too to be held in partnership with several other persons, who had also a divine commission for the several offices

which they were called to execute.

The same thing may full as easily be proved concerning their next immediate successors, who, though they sat in the seat of ju-Deut. Stice, which was to be where the Ark should vii. 8, rest, according to God's appointment, yet they were oblig'd to determine all debates by the rule of the law, which was committed to their custody, and had been left in writing, not for theirs only, but for the use of all the people. The priests lips should keep knowledge, Mal. ii. 7. and they should seek the law at his mouth (says

the prophet Malachi) but observe the reason he there gives of this, He is the [ayrer G.] messenger of the Lord of Hosts. Now a messenger hath no authority but to deliver the commands of him whose messenger he is.

Numb.

xxvii. 18,

Moses in the chief command over the ChilJosh. viii, dren of Israel, but he required no absolute
33,34,35 submission to any dictates of his own in mat-

Deut. xiii. written law. The prophets themselves had no authority to prescribe any thing contrary to what had been already committed to writing, and publicly known among the people. They appealed to the law and to the testimony.

20.

And Isaiah declares, that this ought always to be the standing rule by which their pretenfions might be tried; and that if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. Now,

Supposing the Scribes and Pharisees, who lived in our Saviour's time, to be regularly placed in the chair of justice, and that they (were lineally descended from those who) had a right to sit in the seat of Moses, and his successors, yet it is not to be supposed, that they could claim any greater privilege than any of their predecessors had done before them. What that was I have shewn at large. And this will guide us,

Secondly, To find out the true meaning of the precept.

the distribution of the special

WE have feen before the character of the persons to whose authority this obedience was injoin'd. - They were those who sat in Moses seat, i. e, as I have explain'd it, in the courts of justice, where all difficult cases relating to the outward observation of the ceremonial law were to be finally decided.

THEY were obliged always to give their

judgment according to the written law, which was still to be their rule; and they had no authority to determine contrary to any plain indisputable point contain'd therein. They were not, by virtue of the place they held, invested with an absolute authority over the consciences of men; nor could they impose any thing upon them as a necessary article of their belief, besides that which God himself imposed upon them, and had caused to be recorded in the books of Moses and the Prophets.

BEYOND this the precept in the text cannot justly be extended. It is evidently a direction in matters of practice only; and that particularly in fuch matters as were to be observ'd and done in relation to the ceremonial law, and those outward observances which had been prescribed by antient legal institu-

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If any legal observations were pen'd in terms and expressions unintelligible to the common multitude, these were to be explained by them who fate in Moses seat. —— If unlearned persons could not easily discern how they were to act in some nice and difficult

42 The Authority of the Church, in Matters

cult cases or circumstances which might possibly occur, at such times it was their duty to repair to the doctors and teachers of the law, and by their direction to conduct their

practice.

This I take to be the full import of the precept; and that Christ intended by it, that the multitude of the Jews, who were then his auditors; and they also among them, who professed themselves to be his disciples, should be conformable to this rule, till the final expiration of that whole oeconomy.

I Know but two cases more to which the precept can possibly be presum'd to be applied; these are, either that the people were hereby required to obey the Scribes and Pharises in whatsoever they injoin'd, as from their own judgment or opinions; or that they must submit to all those injunctions for which they vouched the tradition of the elders. But,

IT feems highly improbable, that Christ had either one or other of these cases in his view, when he gave out that command; or that the multitude, or his disciples, could apprehend him so, if they did but consider the main drift of his discourse concerning that sort of people, either at that, or at any other time before; and the frequent warnings that he gave them, not to be deluded by

them.

The same Evangelist hath before told us, that Jesus said to his disciples, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which afterwards he

Matt. xvi. 6.

of Religion, is merely instructive.

43

fo explain'd to them, that they clearly underflood he spake this of their doctrine; which Matt. xvi. imports not only such things as they taught 12: their hearers to receive from them as things necessary to be believed, but also such traditional ordinances, as they, upon their own authority, should require to be observed.

We cannot possibly suppose, that Christ here commanded his disciples to observe and do according to their direction, when they taught men to dispense with the law of God and nature; as they did expressy in the case of Corban; affirming, that a man might devote Chap. xv. the surplus of his estate to religious uses, and 5. Markvii. without sin permit his father who begat him, 9, 10. and his mother who bare him, to perish for

want of necessary support.

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To affert, that by virtue of this precept the common people were bound to obey whatsoever should be required by the Scribes and Pharisees, is consequently to affirm, that all the multitude would do no more than what in duty to these governors they were oblig'd to do, when, at their command, they preferr'd Barabbas to Christ, and called aloud to Pilate that our Saviour might be crucified; for it is evident in fact, that when Je-Matt. fus was led before Caiaphas, these his affo-xxvi. 57, ciates in the council did not only pass the sentence of guiltiness upon him, but we are expresly told, that the chief priests and elders Chap. persuaded the multitude, that they should ask xxvii. 20. Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

44 The Authority of the Church, in Matters

I SHALL here subjoin the observation of a very learned and pious author in the last century, whose words are these; "Throughout the whole story almost of the Old Testament it may appear that the visible church was the most corrupt judge, either of the truth, or true meaning of God's word; that the people seduced by their goodly shews, and glorious titles of Moses successors, were still brought into the combination of blood, until they brought upon themselves and their posterity, and the holy city, all the righteous blood that was shed upon the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous, until the blood of their Messiah."

Matt. xxiii. 35.

> This being no other than a matter of fact which this learned man afferts, and fuch a fact also as is afferted by our bleffed Lord himfelf, it shews us how improbable it is, that he would give direction to the people to follow their blind guides in whatever they should dictate to them, as from their own private judgment; that would be a deference too much to be given even to the great Sanhedrim, if that had been (as it doth not feem to be) the feat or chair of Moles here spoken of; and much less, therefore, could it be due to those who taught only in the inferior schools or synagogues, who could have no authority, but, under certain rules and limitations, from those who were their superiors.

^{*} Dr. Thomas Jackson's Comments on the Apostles Creed, B. 3. c. 19.

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THE chief priefts themselves, the rulers and elders of the Jewish church, when convened in council to deliberate of that matter, together with the Scribes and Pharisees, had more than once declared their fentence, that Jesus was not the true Messiah; but, on the contrary, that he was an impostor, a false John vii. prophet, and a blasphemer; that he was a 47 -53. deceiver and malefactor, and that, by their xxii. 66, law, he deserved to die. These things they 71. decreed frequently in a very public and folemn manner, and perverted even the Scriptures themselves to countenance their villany.

UNLESS, therefore, we will fay, that the common people were oblig'd to own, that Christ was justly censur'd and condemn'd by these men, it cannot be said, that they were oblig'd in conscience to submit to their decrees and declarations in all cases, even where they vouched the word of God as on their fide; for though they might appeal to that as to a proper judge, yet they had no right to impose upon the people their own arbitrary interpretations, in contradiction to the plain and true sense and meaning of it. But,

IT may, perhaps, be thought, that our Lord, when he gave this precept in the text, might possibly have some regard to the oral law, which the Scribes and Pharisees pretended to have received from the tradition of the elders, derived to them from Joshua; and to Joshua from the mouth of Moses the great

lawgiver. But,

46 The Authority of the Church, in Matters

Ir any man can persuade himself, that Christ intended here to enforce obedience to

the traditions they imposed upon the people as things necessary to be observed, I do not see how such a one can avoid charging our Lord himself with advancing the most palpable contradictions; or what tolerable exposition he can give us of the whole sisteenth that xv. chapter of this very Evangelist. There we find the Scribes and Pharises charging our Lord's disciples with the transgression of these traditions. But does Jesus go about to vindicate his followers, by a confession of their guilt, or a denial of the accusation? Is it not evident, on the contrary, that he owns the charge, but denies the sinfulness of such

On the other hand, doth he not plainly charge the breach of God's commands upon these very traditions, which they so earnestly Ver. 3. contended for? Why do you transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? In which interrogation we may observe, that he doth in effect disown the authority of their oral law, by calling it, their tradition: Which is as much as to fay, it was no other than a mere invention of their own. And to put this matter beyond all contradiction, he afterwards declares it in very plain terms, that they worshipped God in vain, teaching for Ver. 9. doctrines the commandments of men.

neglect?

I HOPE now we may be satisfied, that there was not any obligation laid upon the disciples of Christ, or the people of the Jews,

to submit to the mere personal authority of the Scribes and Pharises, nor to any of those traditions which they pretended to have received from Mases and the elders. The substance of the exhortation, as built upon the premises there laid down, seems to be no more than this, that as they sat in the seat of Moses, their directions were to be obeyed for the due observance of bis law, as left in writing with them; and due regard ought always to be given to those decisions which they made in matters doubtful and undetermined in it.

HAVING now discoursed at large concerning the nature of the argument here made use of by our Saviour, for the better understanding the true meaning of the precept, I shall proceed,

Thirdly, To discover those mistakes which have been built upon it; that it may be seen how very precarious and salse their notions are, who presume from this passage to usurp authority over the consciences of men.

From what has been said I hope it will appear plainly, that here is not any solid foundation to support the claim of absolute obedience from the Christian laity to the determinations of any ecclesiastics, either in matters of saith or practice. If any such authority can be inferred from hence, it must be either in the pope, or in a general council, or in a national, or provincial synod, or

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To obviate all unjust pretentions let us obferve in general, that this was no more than
an occasional precept, given out for the obfervation of such only as had been educated
in, or else had been made proselytes to, and
openly professed the religion of the Jews,
and could be of force no longer than while
that religion lasted. It was of necessity to
cease when Christianity should be once thoroughly established. It concerned their obedience to external ordinances, and even that
only in such things as were prescribed by the
written law; and chiefly in some doubtful
points of practice. And,

WHAT is there in all this to support the authority of some Christians over others, as a perpetual law of Christ? What can be inferr'd from hence for a power in the clergy, or any rulers and governors in the church, to bind the consciences of men to their canons

and decrees?

I. THE Pope can have no pretention to erect his infallible tribunal upon the chair of Moses here spoken of, nor from any authority in the Christian church which is presumed to be upon a level with it; for if his holiness would condescend so low, as to take his pattern from these teachers and governors in the synagogues, rather than from the great Sanhedrim, or the High-priest himself, and confequently to let inferior ministers share with him in his power, yet I have made it very evident,

evident, that they were far from any fuch in-

fallibility as he lays claim to.

If the papal power can be compar'd in any thing to that of the Scribes and Pharisees, it must be only to that usurp'd authority which our Lord reprov'd them for; and in that, it must be owned, the pope hath far exceeded the pattern set him by those professors, in making void the law of God by vain traditions. The Roman pontists have assumed the power, for many ages past, to supersede the law of God, as delivered by Moses in the Old Testament, and by Christ and his Apostles in the New.

It is of no confideration with them, that the Scripture hath expresly said, Thou shalt Exod. xx. not make unto thee any graven image; for they 4. have both caused them to be made, and require all of their communion to bow down

before them.

In vain doth our bleffed Saviour lay a strict command upon every one of his disciples concerning the sacramental cup, in the plainest words imaginable, saying, Drink ye Matt. all of it; for whatever orders Christ hath xxvi, 27-given in this matter, his pretended vicar takes upon him to dispense with them, and forbids the laity to observe them.

'Tis to little purpose, that the great Apostle of the Gentiles contends so earnestly against praying in an unknown tongue; the i Cor. see of Rome disregards his exhortation, and de-xiv. spiseth his authority, and strong reasoning upon the case. And thus they copy after the

E Scribes

2. I CAN fee as little reason from this passage, nor indeed from any other in the Bible, to infer an absolute authority in any council, or fynod, whether general, national, or provincial, to impose canons, or decrees, upon the consciences of men, as of equal importance with the word of God. The case of bishops and presbyters, as convened in councils and fynods, is not parallel to that of Scribes and Pharisees in the Jewish syna-gogues; these were, in those places, to be considered only as acting in a lower station, being themselves subject to the jurisdiction of the great Sanhedrim. It doth not in the least appear, that they, especially of this inferior rank, had any commission to make decrees in matters of religion, which should univerfally oblige the people to the observance of them.

MOSES himself had no such arbitrary power, but appeal'd always to a special commission as deriv'd immediately from heaven. The prophets, who came after him, did not succeed to all the power and authority which he himself had. The Scribes and Pharises had not the authority of the antient prophets; and, as presiding in the synagogues, they were not at the head of ecclesiastical affairs.

ALL that our Saviour faid concerning their authority, and the submission of the common people to it, as far as I perceive, amounts to nothing more than this, that they were obliged to instruct particular persons in their duty out of the written law, when they were applied to for their direction and advice; and that the people should repair to them for their instruction, and observe their good advice, without being prejudiced, or scandalized by their bad example. But what, I pray, is all this to the imposing articles of faith, or rules of practice, not warranted by the Scripture, and, perhaps, in contradiction to it, by the sole authority of synods or councils?

3. If councils and fynods can claim no fuch authority from hence, much less can any private pastor pretend to do it. The jurisdiction which is wanting to the whole collective body, cannot possibly be vested in

every fingle member of that body.

THE sum of all that hath been said is this; Moses published those laws which he declared he had received immediately from God; he himself did not require obedience to them but purely upon that account. His immediate successors did not claim a legislative power, equal to that which Moses had. They who succeeded next to them again neither did, nor justly could, demand it; and others, at a greater distance, had no good grounds to carry this authority, thus derived to them, beyond their predecessors.

CHRIST did not lay any manner of obligation upon his disciples, to observe the orders of the Scribes and Pharisees, upon ac-

52 The Authority of the Church, in Matters

count of their own personal authority; neither doth he seem to have any regard for those traditions which they pretended to have received from Moses and the elders, any farther than to reprove those teachers for the abuse they put upon the people, under the covert of those traditions.

It was only an occasional and temporary precept to the people, to observe those directions which were given for the due discharging of their duty, in whatever the law required to be done by them, while that law continued to be in force. He would not have them to despise, or neglect the good advice and counsel of their guides and teachers, upon the score of any prejudices they might conceive, either from their salse opinions, or their vicious

practices.

Something, without dispute, may be collected from this passage, for the instruction of Christians in all ages. For though it was not directed immediately to his hearers, as under the peculiar character of his disciples, and given to them as an evangelical command, it may, however, be applied, by way of accommodation, to their behaviour in the church. The Christian laity may very justly from hence infer, that in all doubtful and difficult cases of religion, they ought to consult their proper pastors, who may be presumed to be better skilled in these matters, for their direction and advice; and that

that they are not to reject, or difregard their good instructions, or wholsome admonitions, upon the account of any prejudice or dislike they may conceive against their perfons. The errors of their judgment, or their personal failings, will afford no just excuse to those placed under their peculiar care, if they will not hearken to them when they require obedience to the laws of Christ.

But if it be asked, what the unlearned shall do in difficult or doubtful points of religion, in which their teachers, and the learned, are much divided in their judgments, and oppose each others sentiments? How shall they be able to discern which of these is in the right? And in the midst of many contradictions and uncertainties, what course

must they take to find the truth?

I FREELY own, I know of none but this; they must take the Scripture only for their certain rule, and use their best endeavours for the understanding of it. They may advise with those who are set over them in the church; and more especially with those whose known talents, and moral character, is such as gives them reason to hope for a suitable assistance. And this they may depend upon, that those ministers and teachers who refer them to this rule, and who strive to make religion plain and easy to their understandings, not shewing any inclination to perplex them with subtleties and scholastic niceties, are the least

likely to deceive them; and these are they who defire to lead them to the truth, and to guide their feet into the way of

peace.

IF any minister shall presume so far to lord it over God's heritage, as to impose any thing upon the flock of Christ under his peculiar care, as absolutely necessary to salvation, which Christ himself hath not imposed upon them - If he requires an equal fubmission either to his own, or to any human authority what soever, as to the word of God; he is certainly condemned in so doing, by what our Saviour told the Scribes and Pharifees, That they taught for doctrines the com-

Matt. xv. 9.

mandments of men. But,

IF according to his duty, he calls upon them to be mindful of the words which were Spoken before by the boly prophets; by Christ's Apostles; and by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ himself —— If he takes the word of God for his rule and guide, and teacheth nothing but what is therein contain'd, or may be certainly and evidently proved from thence — In this method of proceeding it is their duty, and their interest, to observe and do as he directs, provided still they apprehend his teaching to be conformable, in all respects, to the principles of reason and the word of God; for then they may be well affured, that it is the will of God, and not of man, which they obey.

As it is mens interest, as well as duty, to hearken to their pastors, when they preach

of Religion, is merely instructive.

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unto them the word of life; so it is most certainly the duty of their teachers, to be very careful to impose no other thing upon them, as necessary to salvation, but what they find therein. They are obliged strictly to follow the example of the great Apostle, who declared in behalf of himself, and the rest of the Apostles, We preach not our selves, 2 Conduct Christ Jesus the Lord, and our selves your iv. 5- servants for Jesus sake.



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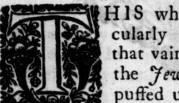


DISCOURSE IV.

The Excellency and Superiority of the Christian Covenant to the Mosaical Dispensation.

HEB. viii. 6.

He is the Mediator of a better Covenant, which was established upon better Promises.



H18 whole epiftle feems particularly to be levelled against that vain conceited humour of the Jews, by which they were puffed up to that degree of ar-

rogance and folly, as to think themselves the only people worthy of God's regard. The law, and the temple, the priesthood, and the sacrifices, were all established according to divine appointment, and they could not endure to think of any considerable alteration in these things: This was one main obstacle against

against their coming into the Christian church, and embracing that faith, which, by slighting all those external pompous modes of worship, could not choose but give them a great disgust; for what could be more distasteful to them, than to see those things vilified and disregarded for which they had always entertain'd such a wonderful veneration?

St. Paul (who is rationally judged to be the author of this epistle) having had his education in one of their chief schools, understood very well where lay their greatest prejudices. These he strives, as much as possible, to root out of their minds. He knew how much they valued the authority of their Lawgiver, and their High-priess; and though he would not detract from the just character which was due to either of them, yet he offers many arguments to convince the Jews, that Christ our priess and lawgiver, was, upon many accounts, superior to them both. This is what he principally insists upon in the first seven chapters.

HE comes at length to prove this superiority, among other arguments, from the excellency of the doctrine which Christ was sent to publish. He hath obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant.

BOTH the Jewish and the Christian dispenfations are mentioned frequently under this title in facred Scripture; and they are so far analogous to human covenants, as there are certain and firictly infifted on by the other.

THE argument here offer'd in confirmation of our Saviour's ministry is, The excellency of his doctrine. He hath given us a better covenant; and that covenant is founded upon better promises. The better to explain and demonstrate the truth and importance of this argument,

First, I SHALL take a short view of the most considerable articles in which they greatly differ.

Secondly, Or those great and glorious promises whereon the Gospel-covenant is

established.

First, Let us take a view of those main articles in which the Christian greatly differs from the covenant or law delivered by Moses to the Jews of old. In this method I shall examine more particularly into the nature and advantages of the Christian religion; and by comparing them together, shall be able more clearly to shew the reason of the preference which is here given to the Christian covenant.

one cannot but observe the vast disparity between these two religions, with regard to virtue and morality on the one hand, and external ordinances on the other. How great attention is demanded by the Gospel to matters of the former fort? And, how little do we see there concerning ceremonies? In the Mosaic law the disproportion is exceeding great the other way. So much room is taken up in that volume with the ritual and showy part, that there is but a very narrow space allotted for the more substantial. The morality of that law is little more than that which is contained in the ten Commandments. All the rest is made up only of such outward rites as have no visible connection with the purity of heart and life.

It cannot be denied, but that the Jews, as well as others, had the advantage of the law of nature; the chief heads of which were fum'd up in the Decalogue, and they were strictly oblig'd to the observance of them, as much at least as they were to those additional laws given by their prophet, over and above

that univerfal law. But,

CHRIST hath not only required obedience to the law of nature, but he hath made it the foundation of his own religion. He hath received and delivered it whole and entire, abating the rigors and discouragements which frail mortals always meet with in their endeavours to come up fully to the terms it proposed; making the knowledge of it more short and easy to be attained; and giving greater helps for the performance of our duty; with full assurance of such rewards as are sufficient to overbalance all the difficulties and hardships we can ever meet with in obeying his commands. Hereby he hath made up all the deficiencies

The Superiority of the Christian Covenant 60 ficiencies of it, and brought it to full perfection.

2. CHRISTIANITY doth far excel the religion of the Old Testament, as it is of a more large extent, and of universal concernment to all mankind.

THE law given by Moses was bounded within a very narrow compass, confined to a small corner of the world, calculated principally for the use of a fingle nation, and peculiarly adapted to their temper and inclination. Many of their religious institutions were chiefly, if not purposely contrived, to divide, and keep them from joining in religious worship with any other nations upon earth. This was the declared intent of that command which was given them to abstain from certain beafts and fowls, which are therefore faid to be unclean; for on that oc-

Lev. xx. casion it is expresly said, I am the Lord your 24, 25. God, who have separated you from other people,

16. Chap. Gr.

SEVERAL of their acts of worship were restrained, not only to the land of Canaan, but xxvi. 1, even to the city and temple of Jerusalem, which render'd it impossible for other nations to join with them therein. The law was proclaimed, and injoin'd to that people on-

Chap. v. ly: 'Tis, Hear, O Ifrael, the statutes and the judgments. And it was prefaced with recounting the deliverance which God had

Ver. 6. wrought by the hand of Moses for that single nation.

In the Christian religion we are under none of these restraints; for we know, and are per-Rom. xiv. suaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing 14, 17. unclean of it self. For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and

peace, and joy in the Holy Ghoft.

CHRIST hath now broken down the middle Ephef. wall of partition between the Jews and Gen-ii. 14. tiles. Now God hath greatly fulfill'd that which he foretold and promised by the Prophet Malacki, that, From the rifing of the fun, even Mal.i. 11. unto the going down of the same, his name should be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense should be offered unto his name, and a pure offering. - We find by John iv. our Lord's discourse with the woman of Sa-21. maria, that for the future no more regard was to be paid to the temple of Jerusalem than to that on Mount Gerizim. And after Matt. his refurrection he gave a large and full com-xxviii. 19, mission to his Apostles, to go, and teach all20. nations; in which he promised to be with them unto the end of the world.

3. THE Christian covenant is better also in respect of its duration; it is a perpetual or

an everlasting covenant.

THE Scriptures of the Old Testament have plainly, and very frequently declared, that the covenant which God made with the Israelites should in time be repealed, and give place to a better. Behold, the days come, Jer. xxxi. faith the Lord, that I will make a new cove-31 nant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. This is the very same which

62 The Superiority of the Christian Covenant

Matt. XV. 24.

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is spoken of by Malachi, and the other prophets, who have at large declared, that it was intended for the Gentiles as well as Yews, though it was published by a descendant of Israel in the line of Judah; and was first preached to the lost sheep of the house of Ifrael; and propagated through the world by his Chap.x.6. Jewish disciples, who did first submit themselves unto it. - From this passage in the Prophet Jeremy the Apostle here infers

(ver. 7.) the insufficiency of the former co-Ver. 7, 13. venant; For, says he, if that first covenant bad been faultless, then should no place have been fought for the second. And in that be faith a new covenant, he bath made the first old.

IT may be objected here indeed, That the Yews looked upon their law to be perpetual. And it is true, that their ceremonial laws concerning facrifices, oblations, &c. are often stiled perpetual, everlasting, statutes for ever, &c. But nothing is more common in the writings of the Old Testament, than to meet with fuch descriptions concerning the condition of persons, things, and states, which are limited, and in their own natures necessa-Gen. xiii rily subject to decay and alteration. So the land of Canaan is faid should be given to Abraham, and his feed for ever. And Sa-

muel was given to abide before the Lord for s Sam. i. ever. David said, he would abide for ever 22. in God's Tabernacle. Such expressions cannot otherwise be understood, than according to the nature of the things spoken of; and

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can mean no more in general, than a long and indeterminate duration.

Though the facrifices, the Levitical priesthood, and other ordinances, were declared perpetual, yet did God, by his Prophet Daniel, expressy tell the Jews, that he would cause the sacrifice and the oblation to Dan. ix. cease; and pointed out the time when that 27.

should happen. But,

CHRIST (who is a priest for ever, after Pfal.cx.4. the order of Melchisedec) because he continueth for ever, bath an unchangeable priesthood:

Which never doth descend from him to any other. And of his kingdom it was prophesi-Dan. si. ed, that it should never be destroyed. His 44 mediatorial kingdom is to last till the consummation of all things; and not till then shall he deliver up the kingdom to God, even 1 Cor. the Father. The times of Christianity are xv. 24 therefore said to be the last days, and the last ages of the world, after which we are to expect no further dispensations, covenants, or revelations, of God's Will to men.

4. THE Christian is a better covenant than that of Moses, as we are hereby required to

act upon clearer, and better principles.

THESE are the principles of love and gratitude, and confidence in God; a reliance upon his promises, and a firm assurance of his goodness to us; to all which we are highly prompted by the consideration of that stupendous act of bounty and compassion in the sending down his only Son to be the Saviour

64 The Superiority of the Christian Covenant of the world, and the mediator of this cove-

nant between God and us.

To this principle of reverential and filial love to our heavenly Father, is added the like duty of fraternal love to all our brethren, universally to all, who are partakers of the fame common nature with our felves. Our Lord hath recommended, above all things, to his disciples, this most generous and prolifick principle of all divine and focial virtues; he hath placed it in the center of this new and perfect system of religion, where it stands. warming and cherishing, ruling and directing, giving motion, life and spirit, to all the duties round about it. This is its just and natural fituation; and from hence it is that the most illustrious and acceptable of all our Christian virtues regularly flow. This was a principle of religion very little understood, and less regarded either by Yews or Heathens.

THE Gentiles were chiefly acted by a spirit of fear, as appears by the cruelty of their facrifices; fome of which they were driven to by this passion, even contrary to the laws of nature and humanity, hoping by fuch methods to propitiate their deities, and calm the fury of those angry Beings, whom they must therefore have imagined to be delighted with blood and cruelty.

I WILL not deny, but some of the wiser and better fort had other thoughts; but such was the notion of the vulgar, and which the generality of the Heathen world had enter-

tain'd

ry best and greatest of all their gods was always represented as bearing ensigns of terror; for which reason the Apostle rightly calls the Heathens (Susidalpoves 1985) worshippers of Acts xvii. demons, and their religion a superstition.

If therefore the comparison had been made between us and them, it would not feem fo ftrange that the preference should be given to Christianity in this particular. But one might reasonably have expected better from that nation, to whom God appeared fo often in a manner very extraordinary; and to whom he had made express revelations of his will; and whom he had commanded to love him with Deut. vi. all their heart, and with all their foul, and5: with all their might; and yet we shall find that they also performed their worship after a mean and flavish manner, fear of punishment being the principal, if not the only motive, which with them doth feem to have been of any force to compel them to obedience. They were no longer kept within the bounds of duty and allegiance to the Lord their God, than while the rod of vengeance was held directly over their heads. The fear of poverty, want, and flavery, plagues, famines, and destructions, were the main engines by which they were to be screwed up to the duties of religion.

This might, perhaps, be owing to a certain stubbornness of temper peculiar to that people, which put their Lawgiver upon contriving such rigid methods of persuasion; but

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how ingenuous or tractable soever their disposition might have been, the perpetual repetition of the most dreadful temporal calamities to be executed upon them, without remission, for every deviation from the rules and precepts which were given them, must have impressed on their souls a slavish kind of terror, which would of course become the main impulfive principle of their obedience. They were then, like a child in the time of his minority, under the discipline of corporal chastisements; but the church of Christ is compared by the Apostle, to the heir, when he is arrived at a full maturity of age, and comes at length to receive his proper portion. Gal. iv. Now, says he, we have received the adoption 1-6. of sons. And because we are sons, God bath fent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father, i. e. enabling us to use

the language, not of servants, but of sons. THE stile and phraseology used in setting forth the terms and conditions of the old and new covenants doth greatly diftinguish them from each other. There is a confiderable difference in the several attributes and images by which the Deity is represented and described in the Mofaic and Evangelic Dispensations. There he generally appears as a great, a mighty, and a terrible God, executing, even in this life, the most dreadful vengeance upon them that hate him. Here we do more commonly find him spoken of under the most indearing and engaging characters. There he is the Lord of Hosts; here he is the God of Love ;

Love; nay, love in the very abstract. God is i John love — There it was, Cursed is he that iv. 8. Deut. consirmeth not all the words of this law to doxxvii. 26. them. But here, the declarations run in a Gal. iii. much kinder strain. Blessed are the poor in Matt. spirit. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are v. 2,80. they that hear the word of God, and keep it. Luke xi.

When the blessed Jesus came into the world the angels proclaimed peace and good-will towards men. If God was known by the Jews as their creator and preserver, and had given sufficient tokens of his mercy and goodness towards them; and if they were sometimes told, That the Lord was merciful and gracious, &c. yet the attributes of power, might, and terror, were more frequent in their writings, and fear was still the ruling principle, by which they were sway'd and governed in their lives.

Our redemption by the blood of Christ is a new beam of divine goodness, added to the former of creation and providence; which doth not only make it shine brighter to our understandings, but to come in stronger and warmer upon our affections too; it animates and quickens our love and gratitude to our

gracious Lord and benefactor.

WE may now rationally conclude, from what God hath done for us, that he will never be wanting to do us good; for feeing he hath given us his only begotten Son, How Rom. viii. Shall be not with him also freely give us all 32. things?

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By the Gospel-covenant we have not only an assurance of all things necessary to us in this present life, which was the reward always promised, and expected by the obedient in the Old Testament; but our faith is to us an evidence of things not seen: The substance

of things hoped for. And this hope makes us not Rom. v.5. ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given

unto us. This is that comforter which Christ hath sent, to kindle, and keep alive

Gal.v.22 the fire of love; for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace — Upon the whole therefore we may conclude, That we act upon clearer, and better principles, than they who were under the dispensation of the law

Tim.i.7 of Moses, seeing that God bath not given us the spirit of fear, but of love, and of a sound mind.

5. We have higher and more spiritual precepts. The doctors of the Jews had put a vail over the face of the moral law: At the time of the incarnation especially they had darken'd it to a very great degree, by their ignorant and superstitious glosses. But Christ has pluck'd off the vail, and wash'd away the paint and sucus, and discovered to us the true complexion, and the native beauty of all the moral precepts.

When he had shewn his hearers the perfection, and the utmost extent of such virtues as had been before injoined, he then discovered how great improvements they were yet capable of receiving, and to what a height of excel-

excellency he defigned to raise them. These additions, and emendations peculiar to Christianity, are so happily contrived, as to have an immediate and most effectual tendency to exalt and purify our nature. They are not matters of speculation and amusement to us; not such only as are proper to inlighten our minds, but such as are able also to instame our affections, and rectify the disorders of our hearts.

Our religion requires such a kind of worship from us here on earth, as will be our happiness, and employment, when we go to heaven; and without which we cannot be duly qualified for that place. It is the very same for substance, and differs only in degree from that which is performed by the blessed

angels.

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THE pomp and pageantry of external ceremonious worship, incense and perfumes, offerings and facrifices, and the like, are hereby turned into a scheme and system of religion which is wholly spiritual and divine, confisting of faith, hope, love, joy, humility, meekness, contentment, and heavenly contemplation on the divine perfections, and the glories we shall behold in the beatific vision. The main body of our Lord's commands hath an immediate visible connection both with our present, and our future happiness. What he chiefly requires is, That we should strive as much as possible, to conform all our inclinations and affections, and our whole behaviour to the will of God; that we should en-F 3 deavour

deavour with our utmost diligence, and rational service, to form his divine image in our souls; that we should withdraw our hearts from a too close and dangerous attachment to the riches, honours, and pleasures of this world, and set our affections upon the things above.

ALL this was directly opposite to the low and carnal conceptions of the Jews, who sought to please the Lord by external offices, for which they hoped to be rewarded with temporal advantages: This inclined them to interpret all the precepts of their law as was most consistent with their worldly ex-

pectations.

THAT eminent degree of holines which is contain'd in the Christian doctrines, beyond what was discernable in those of the Law, will easily be apprehended by the meanest understanding, from Christ's discourse upon the mount, and what follows immediately for the confirmation of his precepts, and the divine authority of the teacher.

HERE we are not only forbid to kill, as were they of old, but we are prohibited to be angry without a cause; or so much as to vex and provoke our brother, by any reproachful and abusive language. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shall not kill: And who so ever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, that who so ever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment: And who so ever shall say unto his brother Raca, shall be

Matt. v.

in danger of the council: But who soever shall Jay, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire.

CHASTITY is another of those virtues which Christ hath exalted to a more excellent degree. He commands us, not only to preferve our bodies from actual pollution, but he will not allow any unclean thoughts and desires. Ye have heard that it was said by Matt. v. them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adulte- 27, 28.

ry. But I say unto you, That who sever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

CONJUGAL love, and a strict unity between Ver. 31, man and wife, is injoin'd by Christ, contra-32. ry to the corrupt doctrine then taught in the Chap. xix. fynagogues, and to the liberty and practice 4, 5, 6, 8. of the Yews, to whom polygamy was permitted for the bardness of their bearts, and divorcing their wives for the flightest causes. But he proves the contrary to be more agreeable to the designs of God in their original creation; for feeing that at the first there was but one man and one woman created, for the mutual affistance and comfort of each other. he thence argues, that the same method ought perpetually to be observed. He who made them at the beginning made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh.

THAT perjury was unlawful the Jews confessed; and that they might not use the facred name of God on every slight occasion,

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Matt. freely swear by any of his creatures; but v. 33, 50. Christ forbids even this also in common conversation, because of the relation which they bear to God himself, and the concern which he hath in the taking of an oath.

FORGIVING injuries, if it be not a command peculiar to the Gospel, yet that which Christ hath added to it must needs be so ac-Ver. 44. counted; that we must love our enemies; do Ver. 38. good to them, and pray for them; whereas the law of retaliation was allowed and practi-

fed by them of old.

I MIGHT here proceed to other Christian precepts; but these which have been mentioned are sufficient of themselves to shew the pre-eminence of the Christian to the Jewish constitution: By these we may perceive, that the precepts of Christianity are of such a nature, as by the observation of them we shall strangle sin in the very birth. Christ hath placed such a guard about our hearts as will make them inaccessible to all temptations, if we are not negligent in watching the avenues of them.

6. ANOTHER very material difference, which I shall observe upon this head, is this, That Christ hath not only given us higher, and more spiritual precepts, but these also he hath enforced upon us with more powerful arguments for obedience.

WHEN we are required to love God above all things, how rational must this appear to us, when we consider, that he so loved us, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosever John iii. believeth in him should not perish, but have 16.

everlasting life!

It ought not now to seem a hard command to us, that we should love our neighbour as our selves; and that we should prosecute our very enemies with love and kindness, if we remember, that God hath so commended his love Rom. v.8. towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. And if God so loved us, I John iv. then ought we also to love one another.

We are now adopted into the same family; co-heirs of the same promises by faith in Christ; made members of the same body; united under him our head. Now we are the 1 Corbody of Christ, and members in particular. XIII. 27.

This is a further obligation to the same

duty.

To exhort us to purity and chastity we have these arguments peculiar to us, That we are members of Christ, and temples of the Holy Ghost: And because our bodies, as well as our souls, are now sanctified by the blood of the covenant. Now, shall we take the Cor. vi. members of Christ, and make them the members 15, 19. of an harlot? And shall we not think it just, that God should destroy him, who presumes to desile the temple of the Holy Ghost.

To encourage our humility we have the example of him, who being in the form of God, Phil, ii, yet emptied himself, and took upon him the 6, 7.

form of a servant.

WE can no longer think it an hard thing to pay all due submission and obedience to

our fuperiors, if we reflect upon his behaviour here on earth; who though he was free,

Phil. ii. 8. and Lord of all, yet he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; a most dis-

honourable and painful death.

Thus I have endeavoured to explain the true nature of the covenant of grace, as it stands in opposition to the law of Moles; the fum of which is this, That we have now a larger and more extensive, a more durable and lasting covenant - That we are now to act upon nobler principles than those of the Jews were ____ That we have higher and more spiritual precepts, for the guidance of our lives and conversations - That we have feveral new, and those very powerful and cogent arguments, to engage us to perform the conditions required on our part, for obtaining the promises of this holy covenant: So that I have nothing more to add, upon this first branch of the text, but earnestly to exhort you, that as you are enter'd into a religion fo pure and holy, and every way fo truly worthy of the highest powers of rational creatures, fo you would strive to con-· form your lives according to it; and that you would in some good measure endeavour to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.

WE may perceive by this plain and short account of Christianity, that it doth not delight in making a great shew of pompous and ceremonious worship. And by this we may inform our selves, that all that outward

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gaiety and splendor, that gaudy shew of so many tiresome and expensive modes of worship, in which the church of Rome delights and prides her self, can be no certain evidence of the agreeableness of her present constitution with true and genuine Christianity, but

the contrary.

FROM that charitable and benevolent behaviour towards our brethren, that meek and humble, that yielding, merciful, and forgiving temper, which our Lord hath recommended, we may fairly conclude, as well of churches as of private persons, that where we fee a spirit of pride and arrogancy, assuming to themselves an unwarrantable superiority over the whole flock of Christ, and impioully lording it over God's heritage; that they who do so are no true Christians; and though they take upon them the stile and title of the only true and catholic church, yet that very claim gives one main proof of the very contrary to that which they pretend.

CHRISTIANITY, as I have shewn, doth principally consist in a spirit of love and charity, and that purity and integrity of heart, which is the vital principle from whence all actions truly Christian ought to flow. It exalts our desires towards heaven and heavenly things. It calms and sweetens all the raging and bitter passions of our souls, and reconciles our affections one towards another. Where we see not these fruits of our holy faith, there we may conclude it is defe-

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fective, even in the most essential parts of it.

From hence we may infer also, That whatever church shall presume to maintain, or notoriously defend any doctrine contrary to this spirit of love and tenderness, and give countenance to any cruelty, in persecuting and destroying their Fellow-Christians, it hath so far deviated from that good principle which is the very mark and characteristic of true Christianity.



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DISCOURSE V.

The Excellency and Superiority of the Christian Covenant to all other Dispensations.

HEB. viii. 6.

He is the Mediator of a better Covenant, which was established upon better Promises.

what is treated of in the former part of this epiftle, and especially in the fifth, fixth, and feventh chapters, contain in them an argument to prove the ministry of Jesus Christ to be more excellent than that of the High-priest among the Jews; and that is, because he taught a religion more pure and perfect in it self; and which hath given us greater and nobler promises, for the better encouragement of all those who shall duly

tions of it.

By what hath been already spoken to it may be feen, not only that the Christian religion extends it felf beyond the narrow bounds of Judaism, and sheds its happy influences over all the world, holding forth its bleffings to all mankind indifferently; but alfo, that it is an everlasting covenant, being made so perfect, that it needs no future alteration, or amendment. We are hereby freed from flavish fears, and tied to the observation of its precepts by the cords of love. These precepts are not arbitrary or useless in themfelves, but they are founded in the nature and reason of things, and rightly calculated for promoting the interest and happiness of mankind, and for exalting the human foul to all possible perfection. I shall now shew.

Secondly, WHAT are those great and glorious promises on which the Christian covenant is established.

In this covenant all our natural infirmities are graciously considered; and proper helps provided to support us under all the difficulties of our calling, and to carry us with safety and honour through the most violent, and dangerous temptations.

is, the certain affurance therein given us, of an absolute plenary remission of all our sins upon repentance, which, by the gracious

terms

terms of this holy covenant, is made equivalent to a state of unfinning perfect obedience to the divine laws through the whole course of our lives. Whatever hopes and confolations men might formerly have conceived by reasoning, and drawing consequences from the moral attributes of God, or the descriptions of divine benevolence in the books of Moses, and the Prophets, they all fall short of those plain and full affurances which Christ hath given us of a perfect reconciliation with our Maker, through his most

powerful mediation for us.

In this appears the rigor of the law of nature. That it requires a perfect obedience to whatever reason tells us is the indispensable duty of all rational creatures. The very best of men, upon a diligent and exact scrutiny into their past behaviour, from the time their rational life commenc'd, will find fufficient cause to condemn themselves, as having greatly violated the laws of reason; frequently through human frailty; fometimes too through wilfulness and presumption. The offender under this just sense of his condition, and recollecting also that he must be accountable for his misconduct to the author of his being, must fall into a very wretched and disconsolate state of mind, and continue in the agonies of a wounded conscience, unless he can discover some proper method of reconcilement with the Deity. The law of nature cannot yield him all the fatisfaction he defires, or the consolation he stands in

need of in this case. There is no provision made in that law for giving him an absolute discharge from the guilt and punishment of all offences. The state of Deism affords no other consolation to the sinner, than what arises from some rational and probable hopes of safety, drawn from the contemplation of God's moral attributes of mercy and goodness; which is short of certainty, and the full assurance of indemnity.

Exod. xxxiv.6,

MOSES told the Jews indeed, as from the mouth of God himself, that, The Lord God was merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin. But even this amounts not to a full assurance, that, after great and wilful breaches of divine commands, the offenders shall, immediately upon repentance and amendment of their lives, be restored to the same state of savour and acceptance with their Maker, as if they never had transgressions. But,

CHRISTIANITY hath taught us by whose mediation and intercession this privilege hath been obtained. And in this we are not lest to depend upon bare conjectures, uncertain hopes or probabilities, or consequential reasonings, from the mercy and goodness of God; but we have a full and positive assurance given us in the Gospel, that by repentance, faith, and sincere obedience to the laws of Christ, we shall receive remission of our fins, being persectly reconciled to God through

through the blood of the Redeemer, and made partakers of everlafting life. If any I John ii, man fin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our fins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

THE other promises, peculiar to this holy covenant, are such as do consist of those assistances, by which the faithful are inabled to perform the conditions of it; and of those great rewards which will be given for their

obedience to its laws.

THE prospect of those extraordinary helps and affiftances which God doth graciously afford us, for performing with acceptance our part of this holy covenant, is very delightful

and encouraging. As,

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I. WE have here more ftrength to inable us successfully to encounter the greatest difficulties we can meet with in our Christian conflicts. As of old God sometimes was pleafed to affift his people, by fending down a host of angels to fight their battles against their heathen enemies; so now, in that war, which we are called to wage against spiritual wickedness in high places, he hath sent forth Heb. i. his angels to minister for them who shall be 14. heirs of Salvation. And yet this help, great and powerful as it is, is not the most considerable part of that supernatural strength by which we are affifted. For,

2. By the energy of the Holy Ghost; It is Phil. ii. God who worketh in us, both to will and to do 13. of his good pleasure. The holy Spirit helpeth Rom. viii.

our infirmities; confirms our faith; inflames our love; subdues our passions; enlivens our affections; comforts and refreshes our spirits; enlightens our fouls, by reprefenting to them the ideas and motives of divine love. and a prospect of that invisible glory which is prepared for them in the kingdom of heaven. The devil may fummon all his strength, and make head against us with the united forces of our own corrupt affections on the one hand, and all the temptations of the world, its troubles and its pleafores, on the other; yet the grace of God, working in us by his holy spirit, is able to secure us from

I John iv. their most fierce affaults: Because greater is be that is in believers, than he that is in the

world.

3. For carrying on the more effectually the work of our falvation, our Saviour hath not only prevailed with God to affift us by the ministry of angels, and of the Holy Spirit here on earth; but, fince his glorious ascension into heaven, he sits continually on Heb. vii. the right hand of God, making powerful in-

25. tercession for us.

11, 12.

This is a great advantage which was wanting to the Jews; for the priests, who be-Chap. x. longed to their temple, flood daily ministring, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which could never take away fins: But this man, after be bad offered one sacrifice for fins, for ever fat down on the right hand of God. The atonement, indeed, was but once made; the facrifice but once offered for our fine; but

but he continues to be our advocate for ever, and to put up daily his prevailing interceffions for us. Wherefore he is able to save them Heb. vii. to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, 25 feeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

THESE are the promises which consist of those helps and affistances by which we are inabled to perform the conditions of our Christian covenant.

THE other fort of promises made to us in the Gospel, and which gives it a just preference to the Mofaic law, is that which contains the rewards that shall be given us upon the due performance of those conditions which are required on our part. We have nobler and more excellent rewards than could ever be expected by the Jews, for the most exact obedience to the law: To that they were invited by the hopes of worldly profits and temporal advantages; but Christ is the mediator of a better covenant, which is also established upon better promises, as he bath? Tim. brought life and immortality to light through 1. 10. the Gospel. He hath now given us a complete and full affurance, that we shall obtain immortal life, if we believe and obey the Gospel, which he hath published and made known unto us - This I take to be the principal reason, why it is here said to be established upon better promises.

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AGAINST this I know it may be argued, That it was either promised, or fairly intimated at least, in the Old Testament, That

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all those who loved the Lord their God with all their hearts, and sincerely obeyed, according to the uttermost of their power, the moral precepts of the law, might expect, by such a behaviour, to obtain everlasting blessedness in heaven, as well as they might justly fear to suffer suture punishments in hell, for their sin and disobedience. And we are told, in this very epistle, That Moses himself was acted by such a faith, which made him choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a

Season. But,

Heb. xi.

24, 25.

In answer to this objection I desire it may be noted, That although heaven and immortal happiness might be intimated in some obscure expressions by the Prophets of old, and might be hoped for, and expected by some of the most pious and faithful of those who lived before the incarnation of Christ; yet it was no where so plainly and expressly revealed to them, as that all they who read their Scriptures might easily apprehend it, and every righteous person depend upon it. Again,

It is further to be observed, That the hopes and expectations, which those extraordinary persons had of that matter, were founded, not upon the first, but upon the second covenant; and upon those inspirations which had been given to some of them concerning the

Meffiah.

This we may plainly see in the case of Moses, beforementioned; where the words imme-

immediately following those just now cited from this epiftle, fay, that he suffered that affliction with fuch patience and magnanimity, merely upon the prospect of his future falvation by Jesus Christ; for the words are, Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches Heb. xi. than the treasures in Egypt: For he had 26. respect unto the recompense of the reward. And,

AT the end of that noble catalogue of fuffering faints, of whom, the Apostle there says, the world was not worthy; he concludes the whole relation with this remark, That although they obtained a good report, upon the Ver. 38. account of their faith and perseverance, yet they received not the promise; God baving Ver. 30, provided some better thing for us, that they 49. without us should not be made perfect -Notwithstanding all their various tortures and persecutions, and sundry kinds of death, yet they shall not be admitted to any perfect happiness, or receive the crown of glory prepared for them, till the general refurrection, which Christ hath purchased for us; when we, together with them, shall bave our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and foul, in his eternal and everlasting glory.

THERE was a famous fect among the Jews who had not the least thought or expectation of a refurrection from the dead. And though the Pharifees, and others, differ'd from them in this matter, and believed the immortality of the foul, yet they had not a proper notion of the refurrection of the

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body; for this seems altogether inconsistent with their doctrine, who taught, that the souls of good men * passed out of one body into another: So that every soul made use, as they seem to have supposed, of several bodies, or at least in its new life inhabited a different body from that which it had before; and so that the body of slesh in which the soul acted here, did not, according to them, rise from death.

The notion therefore, and belief, of the refurrection of the same soul, and dead body, which lived here, is the peculiar doctrine and happiness of Christians. Our Lord Christ, by his resurrection, and ascension into heaven, hath opened for us the everlasting doors. He hath exalted our human nature to a pitch of glory above the angels. By that act he hath given us assurance, that heaven is not inaccessible to men; for seeing that our human nature, in his person, is already enter'd into those glorious mansions, we may depend upon the promise which he made to his disciples, and in them to all faithful Christians, That he went to prepare a place for theme

John xiv. That he went to prepare a place for them;

that he would come again, and receive them
to himself, that where he is, there they might

Heb. x. be also. This is the new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh. And by this it

Chap. vi. is, that we have our hope, as an anchor of the 19, 20. foul, both sure and stedfast, which enters into

^{*} Melacaiven eis ereen căpa. Jos. de B. Jud. lib. 2. c. 7.

that within the vail; whither the forerunner

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WHEN we consider the mighty privileges and advantages, which we Christians have, even above them who were formerly God's own peculiar people, in such excellent principles and precepts; in such powerful aids and affistances; and in the good affurance given us of such exceeding great and glorious rewards; it will be a reproach and shame to us, if we do not more than others; and more shameful still, if, instead of this, we shall be found to have come behind them, in the free and chearful execution of our duty.

Some of them made a fine appearance in the flesh, by a great austerity, and an exact regularity in their outward behaviour; and yet, for all that, came short of heaven; and therefore, for God's sake, let us not come short of them. If some of them also could go much farther, and grope out their way to heaven, through a night of ignorance and gross errors, what a shameful thing is it, for us, to stumble in the day, and now that the

day-spring from on high bath visited us?

If we read the stories of several holy men and women in the Old Testament, we shall find many notable examples of piety and virtue, even among those who do not seem to have had any particular illuminations, or extraordinary inspirations from above. Let us therefore blush to see them go before us, even in those virtues, in which the Christian-

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The Superiority of the Christian Covenant covenant doth most especially require us to excel all others.

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When they were carried away into captivity, and lived in the midst of idolatrous nations, we find that many of them still remember'd the God of their fathers, and made open profession of his name. They were not ashamed of the service of their God; and if they were at all faulty in this point, it seems rather to have been by a vain shew and oftentation in the outward ceremonies of religion. But,

THERE is nothing more notorious, than for many of them who are called by the name of Christ, upon many occasions, to seem ashamed of their profession; and to omit many Christian duties; for fear they should expose themselves to the jest and scorn, and unjust reproaches of profligate and ungodly men.

MANY of them under the old covenant were watchful in their callings; temperate in their lives; frequent in their devotions; chaste in their conversation; grave and decent in their behaviour; and all this without such assistance and encouragement, as is now afforded us; and without such a rich and glorious prospect as is laid before us—Where then is the least hope or probability that any Christian shall obtain salvation, who takes no care to adorn his soul with christian virtues, when he may be supported in his duty by so many helps and extraordinary advantages?

LET them consider this, who give themselves up to negligence and sloth; to luxury
and intemperance; and to sulfil the lusts of
the sless: Who are light and vain in their deportment, and are not ashamed to utter immodest and obscene words in their common
conversation; let them consider the purity
of that high and holy calling wherewith they
are called; consider this, I say, and let no
corrupt communication proceed out of their
mouth.

To what purpose are we indued with so much strength, if we shall still suffer our selves to be carried away with every weak and vain imagination? Do we expect that God will send his holy angels out of heaven, to fight our battles against our spiritual enemies, whilst we basely join our forces with the adversary against them, and our own souls too?

Do we expect the bleffed Spirit to work upon our obstinate hearts by an irresistable operation? (Some men indeed have thought so; but it is a vain conceit.) Can we ever hope that he will continue to work in us of his good pleasure, if we do not also strive to work out our own salvation?

Is it possible that we can rationally depend upon Christ's intercession for us with his heavenly Father, while we neglect to offer up our most fervent and constant prayers at the throne of grace, for our own interest and protection?

Gop hath not dispensed with our obedience under the happy covenant of the Gofpel; but he hath changed it into that which is more rational and perfect; and he requires that we should perform it after a more excellent and perfect manner. To that intent it is that he is pleased to co-operate with us so many ways, both by external and inter-

nal helps.

No wife prince or potentate would make a vast preparation, and raise a mighty army. with exceeding great expence, only for reducing some small inconsiderable place. No man of common understanding will make a vast profusion of his wealth, and muster all the strength and forces of himself and friends, only for carrying on fome low and mean defign. No merchant would be willing to export a large stock of the choicest and richest treasures of his country, without expecting a return, in some measure, answerable to the charges he hath expended in the voyage. The husbandman, when he has tilled and cultivated his land in the most advantageous and skilful manner; when he has plowed and manured it with more than ordinary care, and charge, and pains, and fowed it with the best and properest kind of feed, will very reasonably expect that it should produce a better and more profitable crop, than that upon which he hath not bestowed half that coft and labour.

THESE comparisons are very plain and intelligible; and the application of them to the case

case before us is not very difficult. 'Tis easy to infer from hence, that the life of a Christian should produce the fruits of holiness and righteousness, in some proportion to the gifts and graces which God hath so largely and bountifully bestowed upon us — What mighty thing is it, if God now demands more from us, than he did formerly from a blind Heathen, or a carnal Jew, as long as he hath given us such powerful assistance as will make our burden comparatively lighter?

If the prize contended for be more honourable and precious than what the antients had in view, we shall have the less cause to repine at the difficulty or tediousness of the race. It should engage us to strive with so much greater chearfulness and vigor, and to persevere with greater courage to the end.

WE have no reason to be cast down, or crouch under any burden God sees fit to lay upon our shoulders; neither need we to start back at the appearance of any difficulties he may call us to encounter with, when we are affured, that we may obtain the help of his allpowerful Spirit, if we pray for it; and that we shall not want ability to do all things through Christ who strengthens us. For though 'tis true, as the Apostle says, that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against all the powers of darkness; yet we need not fear but we shall be able to cast down imagi- 2 Cor. nations, and every high thing that exaltethx. 5: it self against the knowledge of God; and at length to bring into captivity every thought to the

The Superiority, &c.

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2 Cor. x. 4. the obedience of Christ: Seeing the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.

WHEN we are called to struggle with any violent temptations we may think upon these great and glorious promises, which will undoubtedly be fulfill'd to all them who continue manfully to fight under Christ's banner.

WE may now joyfully look up to heaven, and fee those crowns of glory, which are there laid up for all those who proceed constantly and resolutely, till they have finished their course on earth, in a faithful obedience to the commands of Christ. We may run with courage the race that is set before us, since we shall be certain to obtain the prize of our high calling, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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DISCOURSE VI.

The Spirit and Temper of the Christian Religion.

St. LUKE. ix. 54, 55, 56.

And when his Disciples James and John, saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command Fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Te know not what manner of Spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy Mens lives, but to save them.



E have here before us a passage as remarkable and instructive, as any to be met with in the evangelic history; a passage, which shews at once the frail-

ty and degeneracy of human nature; the wisdom and goodness of our gracious lawgiver; the excellency of his precepts, and the grand grand design of his religion; which we shall find by the several circumstances here to be considered, is to calm our unruly passions; to sweeten our dispositions; to beget in us a heavenly temper; to liken us to our Maker; and to make us partakers of the divine nature here on earth, that we may be duly qualified to become partakers of his glory in the mansions of the blessed.

THE economy of God's church on earth was now foon to be abolished; and the Christian church erected in its stead. The antient model was going to be changed; new laws to be established; new rules of discipline to be learn'd; and other methods of propagating the doctrine Christ had preached, than those by which the 'jewish doctors and rulers in the

church had formerly been guided.

The chief ministers of Christ's church or kingdom were already chosen. As yet they had only a temporary and limited commission; but their authority being in a little time very much to be enlarged, it was not fit they should be left under any false notions, or mistakes about the proper measures to be taken for the more effectual exercise of their authority. Their old maxims were no way serviceable for promoting the interest of their new religion; and their master took a proper opportunity to rectify their notions, from what befel them in the way, as they were going to Jerusalem.

CHRIST intended to have lodged with his disciples in a village of Samaria, but the

people of the village would not entertain him; refusing to grant to him and his companions such accommodation and refreshment

as were necessary to their journey.

This exasperated two of his disciples, who, 'tis probable, were the messengers he sent before him, to a very great degree; so that if their Lord would have permitted it, those inhospitable persons should have paid very dear for this resulal; but he reproved the rashness of their thought, and would not by any means gratify their desire, in a thing so pernicious and detestable, and so absolutely contradictory to all his great and good designs for the happiness and salvation of all mankind.

This whole transaction affords us very useful observations for the conduct of our lives; all which I shall reduce to these three general Heads.

First, THE fact which gave occasion to the resentment of the two disciples.

Secondly, THE request made upon it, proposed by way of question to their master?

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Thirdly, OUR Lord's answer and resolution of their question, with the declaration of his thoughts upon it.

First, THE fact which gave occasion to the resentment of the two disciples was, the unworthy treatment which their master met with from the inhabitants of a certain vil-

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Luke ix. 51,

lage of Samaria; as it is related in the preceding verses, And it came to pass, when the
time was come that he should be received up,
he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and
sent messengers before his face; and they went,
and enter'd into a village of the Samaritans,
to make ready for him. And they did not reeeive him, because his face was as though he
would go to Jerusalem.

This was the fact which James and John were so provoked at when they saw it. This rude and churlish behaviour of these country villagers was it which raised their passions to so exorbitant a pitch, as to pray, that fire might be sent down from heaven to destroy them suddenly. But by the check which our Saviour gave to this their barbarous request, we see that the temper of the Samaritans, and that of these disciples, was equally displeasing to him.

As to the behaviour of the Samaritans, there are two things which deserve distinctly

to be considered,

I. THE rough usage of Christ and his companions.

2. THE reason of this usage.

1. THE rough usage of Christ and his company was this, that when he sent his messengers to provide a lodging for himself and them, those churls denied even common hospitality to him and his disciples, and would not suffer them to lodge within their village.

HERE are indeed no express words throughout this whole relation, to shew our Lord's dislike of the rude inhospitality of the Samaritans towards himself and his attendants. But there was no need of such a declaration; his mind appears from his sending messengers to desire the freedom of their houses, to hold a conversation with them; and to lay aside, as is thus intimated, the antient grudge between the Jews and them. Of this I shall say something more anon, after I have considered,

2. The reason of that usage, which Saint Luke hath told us in these words, That they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. They would not permit him to quarter in their village, because they apprehended that he, and those attending him, were of the Jewish nation

and religion.

THERE had been very antient feuds, and most bitter animosities were then remaining, between the Jews and the Samaritans. They contended siercely, and did mutually oppose each others interest for many ages. This proceeded from the political and religious differences which were between them; and these breaches, it is likely, were industriously kept open, and not a little widened, as is usual in such cases, by false reports of each others actions and intentions; and by a mispersesentation also of their notions and opinions.

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THE original of that invererate hatred between the Jews and Samaritans, may be traced up for above five hundred years before our Saviour's incarnation, even to the days of Cyrus the Great; for when the Jews, at their return from the Babylonish captivity, had obtain'd a decree from Cyrus to repair the walls, and to rebuild their temple in the city of Jerusalem, that they might again unite themselves in one Commonwealth, and worship God according to their antient Rites, their neighbours, the Samaritans, would fain have mixed themselves among them, under the pretence of affifting them in that work; but in reality to have the better opportunity of doing them the greater mischief. And when they could not gain their ends, their treacherous intentions being discovered, and prevented, they then declared themselves their open enemies. And, what by bribery and other vile contrivances, they did fo far prevail upon the king of Persia's ministers and officers, as to hinder the proceeding in fencing the city, and building the temple; and were the cause that the Jews could make but very little progress in the work for many years together. But,

THAT which ferved chiefly to keep alive the old enmity, and to foment their mutual hatred, was, the difference between them in matters of religion. The refentment on each fide was the more heighten'd and inflamed, because that both parties did profess the worship of the same God, viz. the God of Israel.

The

Ezra, Chap.iv. The points in difference were principally these.

- other books as authentic and canonical, befides the Pentateuch, or the five books of Moses; whereas the fews received with a like regard and veneration, the other sacred books which make up the volume of the Old Testament.
- (2.) They rejected all traditions, and adhered only to the written word. On the other hand, the Jews were so exceedingly fond of those maxims and doctrines, which they embraced as the traditions of the elders, that they did not only equal, but in their practice they did even preser them to the sacred Scriptures; and in several cases they made the com-Mattimandment of God of none effect by their traditions.
- greatly about the place of worship: These contending for Mount Gerizim, and the other for the temple of Jerusalem, which was indeed the place which God had chosen out of all Deut. xii. the tribes to put his name there; the habitation 5, 55 c. unto which they were all to seek, and whither they were commanded all to come, and bring Ver. xii. their burnt-offerings, and their sacrifices, their tithes and heave-offerings; and to perform all their choice vows which they vowed unto the Lord.

THERE they were united for their common worship, till Manasseb the son of Joiada Neh, xiii. the High-priest having married the daughter 28: of Sanballat, and thereby transgressed the H 2 law, law, was driven out; and, fleeing to Samaria with many followers, began the schism, and fet up altar against altar, and temple against temple. And,

Besides these real differences, the Samaritans were accused also by their adversaries,

Prid. Con. as guilty of idolatry. " But this was a ma-Vol. I. " licious calumny; for long before our Savip. 425. 800. " our's time they were become as zealous for

" the worship of the true God, and as great " abhorrers of all manner of idolatry as the " most rigorous of the Yews themselves." --

2 Kings

This flander took its rife from what had forxvii. 24, merly been done there in the days of Shalmaneser. The people whom he had placed there from several Pagan nations did indeed, for some time, worthip their own idols, together with the God of Israel. This was enough to those who hated them, to continue the flander still upon them, however they might afterwards have been altered for the better, and how much foever they might have been reformed both in their principles and practice.

> This, we see, is still the way of zealous bigots in all parties, viz. to charge their adversaries with errors, which they either never held, or which they have long forfaken, and frequently declared against. And this, 'tis certain, is a most effectual way to widen every breach, and to perpetuate the differen-

ces which have once arisen.

THE Samaritans here spoken of appear to have been possessed with those prejudices, which,

which, in political, and more especially in religious differences, are but too commonly

and generally entertained.

THEY would have nothing to do with those of a different religion from themselves; they would have no manner of familiarity or conversation with them; they would not receive them upon the laws of hospitality, nor treat them with those common offices of courtesy which mere humanity suggests as due to strangers, inosfensive in their carriage, and giving no suspicion of any ill designs. In a word, they would not afford to Christ and his disciples, as to weary travellers, the necessary supports of food and rest.

Our Lord's behaviour, as doth visibly appear in this narration given us by St. Luke, was extremely different from that of these Samaritans; and of all furious party zealots in religious matters, who will not endure any freedom of conversation with those who differ from them in the modes and ceremonies of religious worship; and earnestly exhort and admonish other persons to stir up in themselves, and exert on all occasions, the like intemperate and anti-christian spirit. But,

LET men declaim, and infift as long, and as warmly as they please, on such uncharitable and dividing principles, Christ hath taught us, by his own example, a more generous, rational, and healing doctrine; for though, according to the prejudices which then obtain'd, the Jews would have no deal-Johniv.9. ings with the Samaritans, yet Christ would H 3 most

most willingly have received water from the Johniv.7. woman of Samaria; and made no scruple to request it of her. And in the passage now before us, he would have accepted meat from the men within the village; and was defirous, if he had obtained their leave, to take up his lodging with them, notwithstanding the fierce contentions in religion between the Yews and them. And from hence may be collected, with the greatest truth and certainty, our Lord's disapprobation of this behaviour of the Samaritans; and of all others also, who, like them, will have no communication with those of a different religion from themselves. Thus much of the fact which gave occasion to the refentment of the two disciples. I proceed now.

Secondly, To consider the request made upon it, proposed by way of question to their master; Lord, Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume

them, as Elias did?

WHEN James and John perceived in what a churlish manner their master's message was answered by the rude Samaritans, they slew out into a great excess of passion, and desired not only to retaliate this rough usage to them again; but their resentment rose to such a violent extreme, that they would have had them suddenly destroy'd for this resusal.

This, as is most notorious to such as make any observations of what passes in the world about them, is the common method

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of those, who have been persecuted, or ill used on the score of their religion —— to revenge themselves upon their adversaries as often as they have it in their power; and so, by a continual revolution of receiving, and returning injuries, they perpetuate the differences which have once arisen, and in this manner they render all the means and endeavours of better minded persons for a mutual accommodation utterly impracticable.

What further is observable in this religious sury of the two disciples, is, the rash desire they express in that petition, of engaging heaven in their quarrel, as if the Lord their God was indeed a being of like passions with themselves. But this request was ground-

ed upon many errors and mistakes.

THEY prefumed that God was wilfully and maliciously affronted by those men, because they refused to admit them into their village, thereby slighting and throwing contempt upon Jesus, who was the Christ the Son of God; not considering, as they should have done, that the Samaritans could not be guilty of wilfully rejecting the Messiah, till they knew him to be such; or at least till his mission had been proved amongst them by his preaching, and his miracles.

MEN are not to be condemned upon the consequences of their principles which they do not own, or perceive; much less therefore upon those which follow from the faith or principles of other persons, which perhaps are very different from their own. And yet

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this feems to have been the ground of all that rage of these disciples against the poor Samaritans. They themselves believed Jesus to be the Christ; in consequence of which belief, they judged that he ought to be received with that regard and veneration which was due to the Son of God. On this perfuafion they condemned, and would have destroyed these Samaritans, for not treating him according to the dignity of his person.

And thus it is that ignorantly zealous persons are wont to charge their adversaries with consequences which they do not apprehend; forgetting that all men are not equally qualified to judge of things; that they differ mightily in their talents and capacities; that they have not equally the means and opportunities, the helps and advantages, which are necessary for the clear discovery of some truths. Now the case is plain, That no man can be chargeable with a perverse and wicked opposition to any truth which he doth not see. And therefore, when we fee men to act and judge, as we think, erroneously in matters of religion, Christian charity requires, that we should judge very favourably of their errors, and presume, that this may very probably be the case with them. THE two disciples, James and John, were

guilty of misapplying a famous passage in z Kings i the Scripture, vainly concluding, that because Elias had authority from God to destroy the captains and their foldiers, who were fent to apprehend him by the king of

I/rael,

Ifrael, they might, on this occasion, apply to heaven for the like authority. But,

THEIRS was no way parallel to the case and circumstances of that antient Prophet. Abaziah could not possibly be unacquainted with Elijah's character and prophetic office; he must have known the divine predictions delivered by the same person to his father Abab; and the actual accomplishment of that dreadful vengeance which the Prophet had foretold would fall upon Abab, and the cursed Yezebel his queen - He knew also, by what his servants told him from the mouth of the same Prophet, that the divine judgments were even then hanging over his own head, for his impieties and idolatries, and his obstinate rebellion against the God of Israel; and yet, instead of humbling him- 2 Kings i. felf before God, repenting of his errors, and 3, &c. defiring the Prophet's intercession for him, he wilfully perfished in his iniquity, and fought the destruction of the man of God, who had no otherwise offended, than by declaring to his messengers what the angel of the Lord had faid unto him.

From the relation of that story it is apparent, that what the Prophet acted in that matter was not to satisfy his passion and revenge; he stood upon his own defence, being in the utmost danger of his life, which he could not possibly escape without a miraculous interposition of the divine power for his safety; of which, no doubt, the angel who appeared to him had given him full assu-

rance,

rance, and, most probably, directed him to address himself to God for the destruction of his enemies in such a signal manner.

THE foldiers, who were fent to fieze upon him, could not be ignorant of his innocence, and the king's defign upon his life; they ought therefore either not to have gone upon that wicked errand, or, if they could not have avoided it without the peril of their lives, they should at least have made remonstrances against it, and endeavoured to diffuade their master from his wicked purposes. But as nothing of this appears in that relation, we may presume they had their share of guilt in what they went about; and this confirms the justice of that destruction which was brought upon them.

All this was extremely different from the case of Christ and the Samaritans: They knew nothing of his divine authority or Messahship; he had wrought no miracles among them, nor used any other methods of conviction to that purpose. They made no violent attempts either upon the life of him, or his disciples, to put them under the necessity

of such a violent proceeding. But,

IT is the usual manner of a furious and misguided zeal, to put men upon justifying their own passions, their intemperate, unchristian, and irrational behaviour, by perverting some passages of holy Scripture; and more especially some historical accounts of persons in the Old Testament; and by an unwarrantable imitation of some holy man's

example, as they find it there related; in applying which to their own conduct, some very material circumstances are commonly mistaken. And thus we see the two disciples were misled, by the frailty of their nature, and their ungoverned passions, to desire of their master that fire might descend from heaven to consume the Samaritans, by whom they had been thus affronted and provoked.

Thirdly, To this request let us now consider our Lord's answer, and the declaration of his thoughts upon it.

In this there are two things chiefly to be

confidered,

1. His denial of the lawfulness or fitness of the thing.

2. THE reasons of his refusal to comply

with their petition.

1. THAT he denied the lawfulness or fitness of the thing propounded, is evidently implied in the rebuke he gave to those who did propound it. Ye know not what manner

of spirit ye are of.

This manner of answering the request shews, not only his disapprobation of the thing petitioned for, but his displeasure against those who did request it; intimating thereby, that it was a thing so base, that it ought never so much as once to have enter'd into their thoughts; it was neither fit for them to ask, nor him to grant.

The persons who proposed this rash and violent proceeding against their adversaries were only two of his disciples, who are expressly distinguished from the rest, and are not said to speak this as the representatives of their brethren, and in the name of their whole body. These two disciples seem to have had a peculiar warmth and sierceness in their temper, which 'tis not unlikely might cause our Saviour to sirname them

Mark iii. Boanerges, or the sons of thunder. But,

As Christ disliked the spirit of perse

As Christ disliked the spirit of persecution in the Samaritans, much less would he approve of it in his own disciples. This their bitter persecuting zeal was so far from being by him esteemed praise-worthy, that it was severely censured and reproved. He would not endure the least returns of cruelty or severity to be made to those who had given so just a provocation to him.

If Christ would have permitted those incensed brothers to proceed in their mistaken zeal, according to their wish, by an effectual compliance with their surious inclinations; and had been ready so to do upon the like occasions, they must not only have destroyed the Samaritans, for refusing to harbour them in their journey to Jerusalem, but Jerusalem it self must also soon have been destroyed, for what they did at his return, where he met with more inhuman treatment.

2. Let us now confider the reasons of his refusal to comply with their petition; and they were plainly these two,

I. IT

1. It was unsuitable to the spirit and genius of that religion which he taught them.

2. To his design of coming into the world.

1. IT was unsuitable to the spirit and genius of the religion which he taught them. Christianity breaths nothing else but love and tenderness, humility, meekness, and an universal charity and good-will towards men. He informed them, that the root of all our focial duties is, To love our neighbour as Matt. our selves; and that, as to the duties of the xxii. 39. fecond table, this is the fum and substance of all that had been taught them, either in the law, or in the prophets - He charg'd Ver. 40. them to curb all furious and unruly passions; and, proposing to them his own example, he tells them, Learn of me, for I am Chap. meek and lowly in heart — His religion Ki. 29. Chap. v. teacheth us, rather to depart from our own 39, &c. right, than to strive and wrangle about matters of little moment - That we should Ver. 44. love our enemies; bless them that curse us; do good to them that bate us; and pray for them who despitefully use us, and persecute us.

The genuine fruit of the Gospel is love, Gal. v. joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, 22, 23. meekness. The wisdom from above is pure, Jam. iii. peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full 17. of mercy and good fruits. But as for bitter zeal, and envying those who differ from us, this is a sort of wisdom which descendeth not from above; but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

He

2 Tim. ii. He that will be the servant of the Lord Jesus 24, 25. Christ, must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness inTit. iii. 2. structing those that oppose themselves. He must speak evil of no man, must be no brawler, but 1 Cor. xiii. gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. For 7. Christian charity beareth all things, endureth all things. And thus we plainly see how the

Christian charity beareth all things, endureth all things. And thus we plainly see how the desire of the two disciples, to bring down fire from heaven upon their adversaries, was utterly inconsistent with the spirit and genius of Christ's religion. And,

Luke ix. into the world; which, he faith, was not to

56. destroy mens lives, but to save them.

OF this he gave a pregnant instance at this very time, and in this very country, where he ver. 56, had been treated so discourteously; for the he was thus rejected in this village he went into another, and preached the doctrine of salvation to those who were of a more temperate behaviour, and better disposed to receive the truth.

It feems there were fome fuch in the country of Samaria, and particularly in the city of Sychar, where we are informed by St. John, that many of them believed on him; defired his continuance among them; and treated him with much courtefy and civility. And St. Luke informs us, that he was so far from bearing any sentiments of malice and revenge, upon the score of that rude, inhuman usage which he met with, that even after this affront he healed a leper of that nation.

John iv.

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Luke

tion. Nay, his principles and practice of charity towards them was fo remarkable, that his enemies took occasion from thence to call him a Samaritan. John viii.

THE like flanderous aspersions are now too 48. often cast upon those who defire to imitate the benevolent disposition of the blessed Jesus, by a courteous behaviour, and friendly converfation with those who differ from them in their fentiments of religion, and the methods of their outward worship. But they who flander men on this account, and who, instead of charitably conversing with, and doing all the offices of kindness and good-will to those of a different communion from themselves, desire to oppress and persecute them, they are the persons who neglect and flight the good example of the holy Jesus, and copy after that of the two disciples, in that unchristian carriage for which their Lord reproved them: They also greatly deform the features of this bad picture, making it monstrous in a very high degree.

WHAT in James and John was only one fudden excursion of mistaken zeal, is now nursed and cherished in the hearts of some pretended zealous Christians, and there trained up to a full maturity of religious fury. Whoever now do willingly permit themfelves to be led away by these unfriendly pasfions, will not be able to plead hereafter either ignorance or surprize: They are warned against them by our Saviour's animadverfions on the behaviour of those two brethren;

by his very frequent preachings and exhortations to the contrary; and those also fully explain'd, and pathetically urged upon us, in almost every page of the sacred writings,

THESE disciples might have some excuse to plead, in mitigation of their fault, as to the violence and rashness expressed in their petition. They had just before been with their master on the mount, where they saw his glorious transfiguration; where they beheld him clad with the Shechinah, that body of light, with the glory of which they were so transported, that they knew not either what they said or did; and where they heard the voice of God declaring, that he was his beloved Son. After this tis no great wonder to find them heated beyond measure, to see the Lord of glory thus disgraced and vilely treated. Again,

They did not rashly go about to bring destruction upon the rude Samaritans, by directly praying to heaven for it, but desired to know their master's will concerning it, and waited a command from Christ. Let those therefore who will imitate their fiery zeal, in like manner wait at least for a divine commission, before they dare presume to call for mischief on the heads of those who differ in their principles of religion from themselves.

Bu'r as for us, let the mild and charitable behaviour of our Saviour Christ be the only pattern we copy after. Let us hold a neighbourly and friendly communication even with those who do not come into our schemes and

modes

modes of worthip. And let us not regard the flanders which are most unjustly thrown upon us for this truly Christian carriage.

LET the fiery zealots, who know not what spirit they are of, shoot out their arrows, even bitter words, against their Fellow-Christians of a milder temper; let not any he discouraged by their persecuting spirit, while we have the great example of our Lord before us, who, for his healing and reconciling conduct towards both parties, was by the Yews reproached as a Samaritan, and by the Samaritans rejected as a Jew; but hereby shew'd himself a pattern to both of them, to lay afide their mutual animofities, and to defire and endeavour the good of each other, in imitation of him, who by his doctrine, and the conduct of his whole life, verify'd to them, and to all mankind, the defign of his heavenly mission, which was to bring glory to God on high, on earth peace, and good-will towards men, noived Instequal on ber of Enterfile, the Fews, according



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DISCOURSE VII.

The Christian Rule of Faith and Manners. " Dibnog

JOHN v. 39.

Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life.

HEN Jesus had miraculously cured an impotent person at the pool of Bethesda, the Jews, according to their wonted malice, and the blindness of their hearts, instead of being converted by it, did from thence only take occafion of quarrelling with him for it. And because he did this merciful action upon their Sabbath-day, they carried their resentment to fuch a height, that they perfecuted him for Ver. 16. fo doing, and fought to flay him. But he justified his conduct in this particular, and vindicated his proceedings against all their foo-Ver. 17, lish cavillings, from the example of his heavenly

19.

venly Father, and the authority which he derived from him; from the perfect love which God had for him; and the miraculous power with which he had indued him; and particularly the power of raising up the dead; Ver. 20. from the testimony of John the Baptist; and Ver. 33. even of God himself, by a voice from heaven Ver. 37. at the river Jordan, declaring him to be God's own beloved Son, whom he had fent, and commanding every one to give ear unto him. And.

Ir all these proofs could be look'd upon as infufficient to his purpose, he appeals at length to the most undoubted evidence, the holy Scriptures; affuring them, that if they would impartially confult those facred records, they must needs discover, that he was indeed the true Messiah, that great Prophet whom God had promised to send into the word; of whom Moses prophesied of old, telling them, that God would raise up unto them a Prophet like unto him; and to whom Deut. he commanded they should give ear.

By the written law, and the testimonies there recorded of him, he defired to be tried, as to the righteousness of his actions, and the authority of his mission. In them, said he, ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they

which testify of me.

THE matter of controversy between him and them at that time was, concerning the lawfulness of what he did upon the Sabbathday. They had been led into many superstitious opinions about the observation of that

day,

day, by the doctors and teachers of the law, who by their false glosses, and foolish expositions, had obscured the sense and meaning of it. Their guides, relying more upon some vain traditions than the written word, had persuaded the people that works of mercy and charity, if wrought upon the Sabbath,

were displeasing to God.

To convince them of this error Christ appeals to that which they all allowed to be a most unerring rule; and which if they would apply to the subject in dispute impartially and judiciously, they could not but discern the rectitude of his proceedings. Search the Scriptures; or, you fearch the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life. Let them therefore be consulted in this case, and let the righteousness of my behaviour be decided by their verdict.

THE Scriptures then appealed to, for juftifying our Lord's conduct, were the Scriptures of the Old Testament. And the reason of Christ's appealing from the traditions of their elders to the Scriptures was, because their authority was not denied by those with whom he then contended; and because they were more certainly to be relied on, as the word of God, than the judgments and opinions of any of their teachers, how learned or venerable soever they might be thought.

This feems to be the fense of what our Saviour tells the *Pharises* in these words, You fearch the Scriptures, because you judge the way and method of obtaining eternal life

is there described; and perhaps you think to reach this end by the observation of the Sabbath, and such kind of ceremonies; or however, if these alone are not sufficient, yet you think the way to heaven is mark'd out plain enough in the writings of *Moses* and

the Prophets.

BE it so then; and in this I will not contradict you; but confider, I beseech you, in what method you are directed by those facred books to feek eternal life. Are you not by them plainly referr'd to the Messiah, for a more perfect information in the way that leads to immortality. The figns of his divine authority, and the time of his appearance, are plainly pointed out. If you had feriously attended to these proofs and tokens of his coming, you might eafily have perceived that they are all fulfill'd in me. 'Tis therefore very strange that you should not come to me, and embrace the doctrines which I teach, feeing those very writings which you fo zealously adhere to, bear witness to me. The person of the Messiah hath been there described in various characters, and circumstances concerning the time and manner of his birth; the place and family from whence he should proceed, the doctrines he should teach, and the wonders he should work. By these, and every other token mark'd by Moses and the Prophets, as peculiar to the person of the Messiah, I have given convincing proofs that I am be; even such proofs as your own Scriptures do require, the force of

which you cannot easily evade, or deny with any probability of reason, unless you wilfully reject their testimony; which is a thing I am very consident you would not by any means allow to be justly charg'd upon you, neither do I lay it to your charge; to them therefore I refer you to decide our present contro-

versy.

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What was contain'd in Moses and the Prophets, and all the other books which made up the volume of the Old Testament, and by them acknowledg'd as belonging to the sacred canon of the antient Scripture, was their rule of faith and manners. What hath been since written by the Apostles and Evangelists is ours. We have now the last revealed will of God made known to us in these sacred writings. All this Christ hath caused faithfully to be recorded, published, and transmitted down to us, for our comfort, and direction in all our duties, both to God and Man.

This is the standing law by which we must be tried. If we act in conformity to the rules of life, expressed at large in these holy writings, we shall be justified when we stand before the judge; If we transgress the laws therein recorded we shall suffer the punishments which are there denounced against offenders. Now,

SINCE the books of the New Testament are of equal concern to us, as the writings of Moses and the Prophets were to the Jews of old; and since we Christians have the use

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and advantage both of their scriptures, and our own; and which all together do compleat the volume which, by way of excellency, we call the Bible, I shall take occasion from this text to affert and prove, That the whole substance of what is necessary to faith and practice is all comprised in holy Scripture; fo that if we diligently fearch into it, with a fincere defire of knowing, and an effectual resolution of practifing our duty, we shall not go without our portion of joy and blifs in God's eternal kingdom. It is therefore our interest, as well as duty, carefully and constantly to consult and study this divine book. All this I shall endeavour to clear up and confirm, more largely and distinctly, under the following confiderations.

First, THAT all things necessary to salvation are contained in Scripture.

Secondly, THAT whatsoever is necessary to faith or practice is therein fully and clearly revealed.

Thirdly, THAT nothing ought to be accounted necessary to salvation but what the Scripture so declares. I shall shew.

Fourthly, THE Qualifications necessary for judging of our duty according to the Scriptures. And,

Lastly, I SHALL exhort all men to determine of their duty by this rule, and to study it with care.

First, ALL things necessary to salvation

are contained in Scripture.

WHEN I say that all things necessary to salvation are contained in Scripture, I mean by it, That all things which belong either to saith or manners, are to be found there in clear and express terms; or that they are the plain indubitable consequences of such doctrines, or of such rules and directions, as we meet with in these sacred volumes.

THE several particulars of our practical duty, I must confess, are not there each of them singly and separately enumerated; for they are more than can possibly be contained either in the volume of holy Scripture, or any writing whatsoever. To name them all would be an endless, and, if we could perform it, would be a very useless and unprositable undertaking, because the whole compass of a man's life would not suffice for the perusal of such a numberless catalogue of virtues and vices, and that infinite variety of cases to be resolv'd upon them.

It is sufficient to all the ends and purposes of writing Scripture, to give such rules and measures of our duty, as will be a sure direction to us in every case and circumstance of human life, by a rational application of them to our selves, as occasion offers. And as to that, I hope to make it evident, before I shall conclude what I intend to say upon the subject, that the Scripture is not any way

deficient.

ALL practical religion confifts in discharging of our duty to God, our neighbour, and our felves. And fince God hath been gracioully pleased to reveal his will unto us, he hath not left us in the dark as to any one of these particulars. He bath shewed thee, O Mic.vi. 8. man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk bumbly with thy God? And as to all these things, we have still more perfect and compleat instructions, since the Tit. ii. 11, grace of God that bringeth salvation bath ap-12. peared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

THE Pharisees were undoubtedly mistaken, in conceiting that the punctual observation of their legal rites and ceremonies was of it self sufficient to secure the salvation of their souls. And it is certain that they judged amis, if they thought the way to everlasting life was so sully and clearly set before them in their antient books, as to supersede the necessity of any suture revelation.

Some learned persons have thought that Maldo-Christ intimated thus much in the words be-lius, Episfore us; not commanding them to search the copius. Scriptures, as it is in our translation, but allowing, or affirming, that they did it for that purpose. I have also thus paraphrased the text, as it appears to me most agreeable to the connection of the place, there being

no necessity to render the word (epeuvale) imperatively, as in our English version, it being equally capable of an affirmative sense. Granting this to be the sense of it, then thus it stands; 'tis true you search the Scriptures, to learn from thence the way to gain eternal life, but you consider not in what manner 'is there declared; for if you look not for it in the promises and predictions relating to the Messiab, your search will be in vain. Either way the argument stands good. If Christ affirmed that they did fearch the Scriptures for the promise of eternal life, he blames them for not attending to the thing which only could discover it: If he bids them fearch to that intent, it was that they might feek it in the true and proper way in which it could be found.

IF eternal life is not expresly promised in plain terms in the Law and the Prophets, yet notwithstanding this, 'tis therein so far shadowed out in types and figures; and fuch declarations often made concerning God's regard for, and the relation which he bore to the antient patriarchs, and other faithful persons long before departed out of this life, that by a close and due attention the Jews, before the publishing the Gospel, might have conceived some hopes of a bleffed immortality. Thus they all who died in faith of old, tho' they did not expresly receive the Promises, were yet persuaded of them, confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth; declaring plainly that they sought a beavenly councountry. So that if the law had not the very image of the things, it had however a shadow of good things to come. And although it hath been a matter of debate, whether in the Old Testament there be any plain declaration concerning the eternal happiness of the saints, yet it is a principle agreed upon on all sides, that there are many general promises which imply so much, and several prophetic declarations which admit and require this interpretation; those especially relating to the Messiah, and the holy seed. See Dan. xii. 2.

In this sense Christ must have owned the Yews to have been right in their opinion, that by examining, and carefully enquiring into the true meaning of the Scriptures, they might find the promise of eternal life, for by this very argument he undertook to convince them of his own divine mission. 'Tis confessed, that whatever was necessary to the salvation of the Yews, before our Saviour's time, was at least in such a manner all comprised in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. We have therefore good reason to conclude from hence, that the Scriptures, as we now have them, confisting both of the Old and New Testament, must needs contain in them whatfoever is necessary to the salvation of a Christian.

IF Moses, who was but a servant in the Heb. iii. bouse of God, was yet so faithful in it, that 2, &c. he kept nothing back of his Master's will, from them to whom it was appointed that he should reveal it, is it possible to conceive that Christ,

2 Cor. ili. 13.

Christ, who was God's only Son, did not come unto us both with power and inclination more fully to declare it? If the way to eternal life might be discovered by the law of Moses, notwithstanding the vail which was put over it, is it not a much easier thing for Ver. 14, us to find it, fince that vail was done away in Christ, so that we all with open face may now behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord?

18.

Nothing more can be necessary to the falvation of a Christian, but that he study and take care to understand perfectly, and believe faithfully, and obediently fulfil his part of the covenant which God hath made with us in his Son Christ Jesus --- Now the terms of this covenant are fully made known to us in the holy Gospel. And whoever reads the New Testament with an hearty defire to learn his duty, and to behave himself according to it, will find that it is all comprised in these three things, faith in Christ, repentance towards God from dead works, and a fincere obedience to the laws. and precepts of the Gospel.

IT is not only true, that the holy Scripture doth certainly contain all the necessary points of faith and practice, but it is evident, even to a demonstration, that it contains a great deal more — Whoever reads the Bible with modesty and due attention, will soon perceive that there are fome things in it not thoroughly understood by any one; a great many more which are not capable of being understood by all men; that there are many

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circumstances related concerning some certain persons, their actions and discourses, in which all Christians in all ages of the world are not at all concerned; that there are several passages, even in the New Testament it self, and in the Gospels too, the most essential part of it, which contribute very little, if any thing at all, to the better

understanding of our duty. And, had hanted

FROM hence I think it clearly follows, that all things necessary to salvation are undoubtedly recorded in those facred writings. For to fay that the holy pen-men have neglected to put into their books those things which are absolutely necessary to be known by all men, while they have inferted feveral matters, of which we might have been very fafely ignorant, can never be reconciled with a just opinion of their prudence and discretion, their honesty and fidelity; it feems at the same time to approach too nearly towards blasphemy against God himself, and that infallible Spirit by which the Scriptures were directed. A wife and good man would not be guilty of so much weakness and impertinence, how therefore can we impute it to the Holy Ghost, or to the Apostles and Evangelists, if we allow that they were more especially conducted by it in this very great risas) are to be the law by which wright

I, For my part, am fo far from questioning the sufficiency of the holy Scriptures, in all points absolutely necessary to salvation, that I am firmly persuaded all these things may readily be found in the four Gospels, insomuch that if they only had been preserved intire, as we now have them, and all the other parts of Scripture had been destroy'd or loft, we should not even then have wanted a fufficient light to guide us in our way to heaven. And I am fo far from being fingular in this opinion, that a very excellent and learned person hath * maintain'd, that "Every " one of the Evangelists did write the whole "Gospel of Christ." By which he means, as he there explains himself, all the necessary parts of it. So that if we had no other books of Scripture, but one of them alone, we should not be left in ignorance of any thing necessary to be known in order to salvationand and adding an abide to arestor

THE words which were spoken by Christ himself concerning our salvation, are faithfully recorded in the Gospel-history; and these, he hath expressy told us, contain the terms of our falvation. The word that I bave spoken, the same shall judge him, i.e. him who heareth them, or who hath read or heard them, as they are recorded by the Evange-John xii. lifts, The same shall judge him at the last day. These words, or these Scriptures (as we now justly stile them, fince they have now been committed to writing by the facred Historians) are to be the law by which we shall either be acquitted or condemned at the day of judgment.

48.

^{*} Chillingworth, Fol. 71, 77, 161. Edit. 1704.

I SAY not these things as if I had the least intention to undervalue, or disparage the remaining books which make up the sacred volume of the New Testament; but that, since these have by the divine bounty been graciously added to what was before sufficient for directing us to happiness, we may see what ample provision God hath made for our more compleat instruction in the ways of truth and righteousness; and that we may all thankfully acknowledge his unbounded goodness to us.

Ir the histories of the four Evangelists. when added to the books of Moses and the Prophets, are of themselves sufficient to guide us to falvation, have we not great reason then to bless our Maker and Redeemer, for their abundant goodness to us, in giving us moreover fuch further explanations of our duty, and fuch admirable precepts and exhortations to it. as we find particularly in the writings of Saint Paul, and other venerable books which compleat the canon of the New Testament? If it was not strictly necessary to salvation, that all these should have been written, and handed down to us by the providence of God, and the great care and diligence of the primitive church, in transcribing and dispersing copies of them, yet it is certainly very much to our advantage that we now enjoy them. And.

Since it hath pleased our most gracious. God, to communicate unto us so many distinct and particular explications of his will

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and pleasure, as we find recorded in these divine books, it is not to be disputed, but we are obliged to receive them, with all reverence and gratitude, for the mighty benefits which are therein convey'd. Our high opinion of the historical will not lessen our efteem of the epiftolary writings, feeing we cannot but confess, that they are excellently well calculated to beget in us a more lively faith in Christ; to establish and confirm us in that holy faith, by expatiating more largely upon the principles and practices of that religion; to increase our knowledge in divine and spiritual things; and to improve our fouls in all the virtues and graces of the Os (e lalvatien, have we not great realedles)

IF we suppose the Gospels as the original text, and the epistolary writings as excellent comments thereupon; or if we call those the statute laws of our Christian polity, we have then in these several adjudged cases, rightly founded upon those laws, and tending to explain them; shewing, in many particular circumstances of Christian practice, how the general rules ought to be applied. I have often thought, that it may be very useful to confider the whole New Testament in this light, as it may clear up some dark paffages which occur to us in reading the Epiftles; and to shew us plainly where our duty lies, if the precepts in these two different parts of Scripture should seem at any time to clash with one another. Only observation of ,box)

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No just decisions or applications can be made contrary to the express letter of the law. The text it self ought never to be wrested that it may seem to countenance any descants or expositions made upon it, but these must always be reconciled to the plain meaning of the text. And thus in judging rightly of whatever concerns our faith or manners we must rely chiefly upon those directions which we meet with in the Gospels.

By the Scriptures of the New Testament are conveyed to us the royal gifts and largeffes which our bleffed Lord bestowed upon his church, after his afcension into heaven, when he gave some Apostles; and some Pro-Ephes. phets; and some Evangelists; and some Pastorsiv. 11. and Teachers; for the perfecting of the faints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; for as at the first they did perform all this by their instruction and advice, by their preaching and exhortation, fo now they continue still to edify and consummate the church, which is the body of Christ, by those writings which have been faithfully transmitted down to us by the universal tradition of the church in all ages of Christianity; which also is to us an uncontestable proof of their divine authority.

THE truths contained in the other writings of the Apostles, and their fellow-disciples and companions, we do as firmly believe as we do the history of the sacred Gospels; not because they were equally necessary to be made known unto us, but because they were

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composed by men under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that God hath thus been pleafed to reveal them to the world. We cannot, without the highest blasphemy, call in queftion God's veracity; nor have we any reafon to suspect the fidelity of Christ's disciples; and therefore whatfoever they have published as by commission from the Holy Spitit (and which they carefully distinguish from the exhortations or advices they did fometimes give occasionally, as from their own private judgment and discretion) all this we are bound to believe and practife, according to the knowledge we have of it, and as far as it concerns us in our feveral Rations and capacities. grave amof home stade

THOUGH it be very certain, that all things contain'd in the Scriptures are not necessary to falvation, but fuch only as belong to the covenant, or which are there expresly declared as necessary to all men; yet every man, under pain of damnation, is bound to regard and obey whatfoever he fees, and knows to be required of him in the word of God, whether it be found in the Law, or in the

Prophets, in the Gospels, or Epistles.

By what hath been here offered upon this head I hope this proposition, That all things necessary to salvation may be found in Seripture, is sufficiently confirmed; for I prefume this will follow undeniably from what was brought to prove, That the hely writings have not only fo much in them, but that indeed they do contain a great deal more. And now, IF

Ir we consider in how great obscurity the Heathen world lay in regard of a future life, the wifest of them having only probable conectures to depend upon, without any promise or assurance given them from above; how the Jewish doctors had misinterpreted and corrupted the law; and that the promise of eternal life was not expresly made to them, but only shadow'd out in types and figures, and prophefies referring to the times of the Messiah; if we consider these things, we shall find that we have infinite cause of joy and satisfaction, of gratitude and thanksgiving, for that inestimable bounty and goodness of God, by which he hath communicated this rich treasure of the Gospel to us, wherein life and immortality is fo fully brought to light. And,

Since eternal life is more to be defired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; fince it is a pearl of so great a price, that the whole world is not equal to its worth, can any pains be thought too great in seeking where it may be found? And if we have the certain knowledge where the rules and methods of obtaining it are plainly, and without difficulty to be learned, then surely all that we have more to do, to assure to our selves the gaining a possession of this great inheritance in the proper time, is, to labour to understand, and diligently to observe those

LET us therefore diligently fearch the holy Scriptures, for there we are directed how

useful rules and methods.

The Christian Rule, &c.

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to gain this most invaluable treasure. Let these divine books be always in our thoughts; let these be our daily study; let us examine carefully the contents of them; and we shall find that they will be a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path: They will shew us the path of life, and guide us in the way that leads unto it.

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DISCOURSE VIII.

The Christian Rule of Faith and Manners.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life.

for determining the matters in dispute between himself and those who then opposed and contradicted him. In this rule both parties, as it seems, were perfectly agreed, all acknowledging, that the knowledge of eternal life, and the proper rules and methods of obtaining it, were to be sought for, not in the notions and opinions of private men; not in the traditions pretended to have been received and handed down from age to age, as from Moses and the Prophets, but from the written word; from the antient records of God's

will, as published to the world by those whom God had sent in several ages for the admonition and instruction of his people. In them ye think ye have eternal life; you are persuaded that the way to eternal life is to be found in Scripture: Let this be granted, and by this rule let our present controversy be decided.

From the consent and agreement between our Saviour and his adversaries, concerning the sufficiency of the Scriptures for the knowledge and attainment of eternal life, I have stated and confirmed my first proposition, viz. That all things necessary to salvation are

contained in Scripture. And,

IF the knowledge of eternal life might be gathered from the Scriptures of the Old Testament, notwithstanding their obscurity and imperfection, how strongly may we conclude from hence, That the united Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament are sufficient for that purpose? For sure, no one will affirm, that the Gospel of Christ is less perfect than the law of Moses was. And it would be very strange, if any one should maintain in express terms, That the way to eternal life is become more difficult and obscure fince life and immortality hath been brought to light through the Gospel; and yet, if we allow that the Scriptures of the Old Testament were able of themselves to make men wise unto falvation, but that the Scriptures of the New and Old together cannot do it, then certainly we must defend that monstrous paradox.

THERE

THERE are those indeed who have the confidence to affirm, That the Scriptures do not contain all things necessary to salvation. They vainly pretend, that there are some other doctrines, and other rules of faith and manners necessary to be observed in order to salvation, besides those which are recorded in the written word. These are what the papists call the traditions of the church, though they have never yet agreed among themselves, either what they are, or where we may be sure to find them.

We freely grant, that the will of God, however convey'd to us, whether by word or writing, ought to be obeyed with equal reverence and submission, provided we are well assured that it is his will. And therefore if the Romanists could prove to us, that part of God's word, which they say is unwritten, with as good evidence, as the Scriptures can be proved to be his word, we should very willingly receive it. On the contrary, they give no better reason to believe it, but because the church, that is themselves, considently affirm it so to be. But,

LET any man consider with himself, is it in the least probable, that if the Scriptures were imperfect, and insufficient in themselves to guide us to salvation, as containing only one part of what we are obliged as Christians to believe and do, they would not tell us that we might some where or other be more fully instructed in our duty, and refer us for our better information to what was

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otherwise delivered, at the same time acquainting us where that further information may be had? And this is not all neither, for the Scriptures are not only silent as to that, but they do most plainly teach us the very contrary, by bearing testimony to their own

fufficiency.

Our adversaries themselves agree with us in this, That the Scripture is the undoubted word of God, at the same time that they endeavour to persuade us, that it doth not contain the whole will of God, but a part only of his will. In making this concession they condemn themselves; for if they are the word of God, their testimony ought to be received for truth; and this testimony is manifestly on our side, seeing they tell us in plain terms, that the whole will of God, as necessary to be known in order to salvation, is contained in them. In them we have eternal life. They are able to make us wise unto salvation; and out of them the man of God may be furnished to all good works.

This is so certain of the whole, that it is highly probable, as hath been shewn before, that the certain way to life eternal may be discovered in every one of the sour Evangelists. They themselves declare, that their intention was nothing less than to write the whole Gospel of Christ, i. e. all the necessary conditions of the covenant of God with

men in Jesus Christ.

John xx. fign in writing his gospel was, That we might
31.

believe that Jesus is the Son of God; and that believing we might have life through his name: And St, Luke, that he undertook to set forth Luke i, in order those things which were most surely in the believed among Christians; and of which he said he had a perfect understanding: And again, in the beginning of his other book of the Acts of the Apostles, that he made the Acts is former treatise of all things that Jesus began in the beauth to do, and teach, until the day in which he was taken up into beaven.

THE like remark was made by that very antient father Irenæus, who, as he himself Iren. tells us, had seen Polycarp, who had received lib. 3-cap. 1. instruction from the Apostles, and conversed with some of those who had seen the Lord Jesus. Ibid. c. 3. And is it probable that he would have argued as he doth for the perfection and sufficiency of the Scriptures, against those who were not satisfied with what was written, if he had known that there was any point of Christian doctrine which was not to be found in them? If there had been any other rule of faith besides the Scripture, and of like authority with it, that could not be unknown to him who lived so near the apostolic age.

THAT the whole Bible contains all that is necessary to salvation cannot be disputed, after what I have alledged before to prove that it contains a great deal more. The truth is, we have there not only a sufficiency, but even a superfluity. It hath pleased God, out of his exceeding bounty to us, not only to supply us with a bare competency, but he hath

bestowed upon us an immense treasure of divine knowledge; and it is a shame to see so many continue poor in the midst of so much riches; for that this treasure is not lock'd up (by the appointment or consent of him who brought it down from heaven) from the use of any one who earnestly desires and seeks after it, will be made appear under the next thing to be consider'd, which is,

Secondly, THAT whatsoever is necessary to faith or practice is in the Scripture fully and

clearly revealed.

SAINT Paul affures the elders of the church Acts xx. of Epbesus, that he kept back nothing that was Ver. 27. profitable to them; and that he had not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God. Iren. 1. 3. Whatfoever this Apostle taught concerning c. 14, 15 the will of God is intirely and faithfully recorded in his own epiftles, and the gospel of St. Luke, his friend and fellow-traveller, and in the Acts of the Apostles, composed by the fame Evangelist to compleat the facred history. Those things which are most necessary to be believed and practised in order to eternal life, are proposed in Scripture with such a perspicuity of stile, that a fincere and diligent inquirer may, without much difficulty, make a full and clear discovery of them all. If there be any thing of this kind, which may feem to any one as but obscurely mentioned in some particular places, he will find that the facred authors have been careful to repeat, and more largely to explain it, in fome other passages.

WE are often told of doctrines fundamental and effential in religion; and fome which are pretended to be of this fort, and earnestly contended for as fuch, are proposed in terms which they themselves who plead for them do not scruple to confess to be inexplicable, as containing fomething in them beyond the reach of human understanding. But certainly, whatfoever is imposed upon us as an article of our faith, must be such as comes within the compass of our understanding, and especially if it be a doctrine so universally neceffary, that all men to whom it is promulgated are obliged to receive it on pain of God's displeasure. I hope it will appear, in treating on this head, that God is more just and merciful to his creatures than to demand affent from them to any proposition which they are not qualified by any means to understand.

As there is nothing unrevealed in Scripture which is effentially necessary to faith or practice, so we have all the reason in the world to conclude, that nothing which is wrapt up in much obscurity can belong to either of them. Whatever is effential to religion is there delivered in the fullest and the plainest terms. 'Tis as compleat and satisfactory an account of things necessary as if the whole Bible did consist of nothing else, or as if we had ten thousand larger volumes of it. The will of God, in all the most important points of duty, is there as clear and visible, as if it had been written with a sun-beam. 'Tis not only

only fully comprehended in the facred volume, so as to be discoverable by the deep researches of the wise and learned, but it is there so clearly manifested and explain'd, that every man of ordinary capacity may perceive

and understand it perfectly.

Ir all things absolutely necessary to the salvation of all men are not sully and clearly delivered in the Scripture, it must either be because God never did intend the salvation of all men, though they use their utmost diligence to attain it, as some have groundlesly affirmed; or as others, with as little truth and reason, would persuade us, because he hath appointed some other rule as a supplement to that, and which, if it be not in it self more perfect, is at least, as they pretend, more intelligible and plain than the holy Scriptures are. But,

To fay that God never did intend the falvation of all men, and of those especially who diligently seek it, is a flat contradiction to his word, which expressly tells us, that he will have all men to be saved; and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. To say that he hath appointed any other rule, whether oral tradition, or some living infallible guide, is a very consident affertion, while the Scriptures are not only silent concerning such a guide, but also do moreover vindicate and maintain their own sufficiency for this good purpose; as will be more sully proved

anon.

1 Tim. ii. 4.

IF God hath given us no other rule of faith and manners but the Scripture only; and if all things necessary to both these ends are not therein clearly and fufficiently revealed, then God requires some things, for the knowledge and performance of which he hath not afforded the necessary means, which is all one as to fay, That God requires impossibilities of his creatures. But this is such a horrid imputation upon the justice and goodness of God, as methinks should make a Christian tremble at the thought. Can any tyrant exercise a greater cruelty, than to condemn a flave for not performing that which he knew it was utterly impossible for him to perform? Can any infidel or atheift, by denying God's providence or existence, give a greater provocation to him, than they who lay fuch a fcandalous proceeding to his charge? Is it possible to represent our Maker in blacker and more odious colours, than by faying, that he will confign men over to eternal damnation, for not attaining to that end towards which he hath not given them any certain means? For not feeing and following after that which he hath placed beyond the reach of their capacities?

It is indeed alleged by those who deny the sufficiency of the written word for our salvation, that there are many difficulties and obscure passages in the Scripture; and that St. Peter hath confessed thus much concern-2 Pet. iii. ing some things in his brother Paul's epistles. 15, 16. To this I answer, That what they say is very

true;

true; and that there are some difficulties in these epistles, and other parts of holy Scripture too, not only above the understandings of the ignorant and unlearned, but even above the capacities of the most wise and learned, fully to comprehend. St. Augustin ingenuously owns, that in the sacred Scriptures there were more things which he did not understand, than which he did *. If this be not the case of all men 'tis indisputably true of the illiterate. But it may suffice to make men easy under such an apprehension of themselves, to know that what they cannot comprehend is not necessary to be understood by them.

An honest and diligent enquirer into the meaning of such passages as are here spoken of, may satisfy himself with this, that either he shall have a perfect understanding of them, when he hath used his best endeavours to obtain it, or else it is not necessary that he should. An explicit belief of all things contain'd in Scripture is not required of any one; for though he may be well persuaded, that the relation which is made of them is authentic and legitimate, yet if the sense is doubtful, and variously interpreted, so that he knows not what to fix upon, 'tis enough that he believes it to be true in that sense which God intended by it, though what that

is he presumes not to determine.

^{*} In ipsis sanctis Scripturis multo nesciam plura quam sciam. Aug. Ep. 119. ad Januariam, cap. 21.

WHATEVER God requires an explicit belief of; all that is revealed in words fo intelligible, as to be plainly understood by those from whom God doth indispensably require it, after due care taken in the study of the Scriptures. No person who hath any tolerable apprehensions of the infinite goodness and power of the Deity, will dare to fay, either that God was unwilling, or unable to reveal his mind in a manner capable of being clearly understood by the ministry of those whom he vouchfafed to inspire by his infallible Spirit for that very purpose; and if he was both willing and able so to do, it is not to be doubted but that he hath accordingly performed it. It is therefore a most audacious presumption, a flagrant impiety, for any man, or body of men, to take upon them to do it better.

THE difficulties men labour under do not arise from the obscurity of the Scripture, but from the idle commentaries, and forced interpretations, of superstitious and presumptuous men, who think themselves more enlightened than others are; and, having this advantage, they vainly conceit that they are not unqualified to describe those things which are necessary and fundamental in religion, in a plainer manner than the facred writers have performed it; and who expect a like submission to their fanciful expositions as is paid to the divine authority of the Prophets, Apo-Ales, and Evangelists.

105.

THE Christian religion, by the wife ma-ster-builder, and those whom he instructed and imployed under him in that great work, was laid upon a solid basis, of useful, plain, intelligible doctrines; and by them too it was advanced to its proper height and magnitude: Then the symmetry, strength, and beauty, the necessity, conveniency and usefulness of all its parts might easily be discerned; but in a long tract of time it hath been so darken'd and disguised, by those who pretended to adorn and enlarge it, that while men cast their eyes upon these gaudy ornaments, these cumbersome and superfluous additions, they can't fo eafily discern the elegant simplicity of this noble building. Whoever considers the antient model, without regarding, or attending to these foppish coverings, and unnecessary superstructures, will find that it was compleatly finished at the first, and brought at once to its utmost beauty and perfection. Christ not only was the

Heb. xii. author, but he also was the finisher of our faith. Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. iii. II.

THAT all things necessary to be known and practifed are clearly and evidently delivered in the Scriptures, the Scriptures them-Pfal. exix. selves do sufficiently declare. Thy word, says the Pfalmist, is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. It was therefore bright enough to direct him in all the ways which God commanded him to walk in; and confequently, to shew him those things which

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he was most especially concerned to regard. And to the same purpose he declares again, that The testimony of the Lord is sure, making Pal. xixi the simple to become wise; and that it did? not only rejoice the heart, but that it also did Ver. 8. enlighten the eyes of men. And in truth, it is not easy to conceive how it could effectually rejoice the heart, without affording a proportionable degree of light to the eyes. It must be a very impersect satisfaction at the best which results from any thing that we do

not clearly understand.

THE writers of the New Testament have not failed, in their turn also, to give as good affurance concerning the clearness of their writings. St. Paul affures us, that The grace Tit. ii. of God that bringeth salvation bath appeared, 11, 12, or shone forth, to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. And, what can we conceive as necessary to be taught us more than this? If the Gospel hath instructed us in all things necessary to be known in order to salvation, and given us full directions for avoiding all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and for the performance of our whole duty to God, our neighbour, and our felves; and if these things have shone forth to all men, as the words declare, then it is impossible for any man, where the light of the Gospel shines, unless it be his own fault, to be at a loss to know what God requires of him either to believe or practife.

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The same St. Paul declares, that both he,

2 Cor. and the rest of the Apostles, did use great

iii. 12,13 plainness of speech: And not, as Moses, put a

vail over their face. In another place he

Chap.iv. professes, that If their Gospel was bid, it was

3.4 bid only to them that were lost: To such perfons as were blinded by their own carnal lusts,

and so remained in wilful ignorance, less

they should see the truth, and be converted

by it.

CHRIST commanded his Apostles to go and teach the Gospel to every creature; to the poor as well as to the rich; to the ignorant as well as to the learned; to the common people as well as to the priests and rulers. This principle of the perspicuity of his doctrine he confirmed in the plainest manner, by that gracious declaration which he made, without exception even of the meanest and most illiterate persons, who would rely upon him for all the necessary means and helps towards the knowledge and practice of their duty. I am come a light into the world, that whosever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

John xii.

OUR Lord's appealing frequently to the Scriptures of the Old Testament for the righteousness of his proceedings, and for the proofs of his divine mission (as here particularly in the text) and this appeal being sometimes to the common multitude, amounts to a full proof, that in things necessary to salvation the Scriptures are a plain unerring rule, even to the vulgar, provided they diligently search

fearch into, and maturely consider of them with honest hearts, and fincere intentions to believe and practife according to their duty, as they shall there discover it; so that we may fairly conclude this head in the excellent expressions of a very antient writer: " The word is not hid from any man: The " light is common to all; it shines to all " mankind.* " And therefore,

Thirdly, Nothing ought to be accounted necessary to salvation but what the Scripture fo declares. This I take to be a very natural consequence of the foregoing propositions. If the Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation, it follows, with the greatest force of evidence imaginable, That nothing can be added to it but what is actually unnecessary, either as to faith or manners.

GOD, who at fundry times, and in divers Heb. i. manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by 1, 2. the prophets, bath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. From this passage I think it may very justly be inferr'd, That God never intended any further declaration of his will to men, than what hath been delivered and explained by this most glorious messenger. He certainly was most fully instructed in the mind of God the Father; and it can't be thought that he

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^{&#}x27;Ουκ άπεκρύζη τινας ὁ λόγ. Φῶς ές ι κοινον, ἐπιλάμты табы андейтогу. Clem. Alex. Cohort. Fol. 72. Edit. Oxon.

Luke i.

31.

hath concealed any necessary part of it, from those to whom his Gospel is made known, therefore certainly there can be nothing, befides that which is therein contained, that can be necessary to be known or practised.

THE Apostles and Evangelists, and their friends and followers, who committed their instructions to writing for the benefit of the church in that, and all succeeding ages, have fet down every thing which Christ both did and taught. This must needs be understood of all those things which were of absolute necessity to be known. This St. Luke hath plainly told us more than once. And Saint John tells us likewise concerning the writing of his gospel, that These things were written, that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing we might have life through his name. And St. Paul again to the same purpose, speaking of the 2 Tim. iii. inspired Scripture, says, that It is profitable 16, 17. for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto

> all good works. AGAIN, if whatever is necessary to faith or practice is in Scripture fully and clearly revealed unto us, then this I take to be a rational and plain corollary from it, That we have no occasion for any infallible guide to lead us to the true meaning of it, for it is utterly inconfistent with this affertion, to affirm that we stand in need of such a guide.

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ANOTHER conclusion regularly drawn from these premises is this, That all Christians are to seek the mind and will of Christ, their Lord and Master, from those books only in which he hath caused it fully and plainly to be recorded, and they are not therefore bound to rely upon the authority of any authors or teachers in these matters, how high soever their pretensions are.

MEN are not to be led away from the plain fense of Scripture by the glosses or expositions of the wisest, or the best of men; not by the writings of the most antient, or most learned of the fathers; not by the decrees of councils, nor by the definitive sentence of any na-

tional, or provincial fynods.

They who love to extol and magnify the authority of our national church beyond its due measure, should remember how far the church it self hath gone in submitting all its own authority to that of the holy Scripture; and particularly what is said in the sixth of the Thirty Nine Articles, 1562. Ho-Artic. VI. LY SCRIPTURE CONTAINETH ALL THINGS NECESSARY TO SALVATION: SO THAT WHATSOEVER IS NOT READ THEREIN, NOR MAY BE PROVED THEREBY, IS NOT TO BE REQUIRED OF ANY MAN THAT IT SHOULD BE BELIEVED AS AN ARTICLE OF FAITH, OR BE THOUGHT REQUISITE OR NECESSARY TO SALVATION.

This doctrine also is professed by every priest, and bishop, when ordained, or consecrated: Then they are obliged solemnly to

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declare their persuasion of it, and that they will instruct the people according to it. 'Tis a doctrine truly Christian; and this Christian doctrine is afferted and prescribed by the church of *England*; and, if well observed by all its members, would be a good foundation

for Christian unity.

It would undoubtedly very much conduce to bring about this happy end, if all were admitted who agree in this, and no other terms were actually made necessary to our joining with one another in all the offices of Christian worship. Our agreement in this principle ought to be a great engagement to mutual love and Christian charity among those, who, notwithstanding this consent, may differ in judgment or opinions concerning lesser matters.

And therefore, fince we may be well affured, that God pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unseignedly believe his boly Gospel, let us exercise an universal benevolence towards all such as are duly qualified to receive God's merciful forgiveness of all errors or mistakes which we may think them guilty of; and let us also heartily join in this charitable petition of our common liturgy, That all they that confess God's boly name may agree in the truth of his boly Word,

and live in unity and godly love.

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DISCOURSE IX.

The Christian Rule of Faith and Manners.

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JOHN v. 39.

Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life.

HE propositions which have been hitherto discoursed upon, are these, First, That all things necessary to salvation are contained in Scripture.

Secondly, THAT whatfoever is necessary to faith or practice is therein fully and clearly revealed.

Thirdly, THAT nothing ought to be accounted necessary to falvation but what the Scripture so declares.

I Propose now to shew you,

Fourthly, THE Qualifications necessary for judging of our duty according to the Scriptures.

tures. This I thought not improper to confider, before I proceed, to exhort all men to determine of their duty by the rule of Scripture. Such an exhortation, I know certainly, will be to very little purpose, unless men are well satisfied beforehand, that they do not labour under any incapacity for the due performance of that to which they are exhorted. I shall therefore lay before you four several qualifications, which, as they are necessary for all men, however otherwise endowed, so I judge them of themselves sufficient to enable any man to determine rightly of his own duty according to the Scriptures.

THE first of these qualifications is a sincere desire to learn the truth of all that any Christian is obliged to believe and practise, in or-

der to falvation.

2. A DILIGENT use of such means and opportunities as God hath given him for that purpose.

3. A RESOLUTION to obey the will of God, as far as he can discover it, upon his

making fuch a fearch.

4. PRAYER to God for his direction and affiftance. When these particulars are well considered, I hope the exhortation, to adhere strictly and constantly to this only safe and certain rule, will not be urged in vain.

1. SINCERITY is that which I propose as the chief and most necessary qualification for the profitable study of the holy Scriptures. This I look upon to be so perfect and comprehensive that it takes in all the rest; and when

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when rightly understood, and practifed in its full extent, is of it self sufficient to guide us to the true meaning of the holy Scriptures in all things necessary to salvation, and conduct us in the way to everlafting life; fo that I needed not to have mentioned any other, but only for avoiding fuch mistakes, as some are apt to fall into, by a partial confideration of this thing, and not fully comprehending what is really and effectually contain'd in it; and for the better illustration of this very substantial and most material point. As it is applied to the case before us, it is an earnest and hearty defire to learn the true intention of God's holy will, as it is discovered to us in his word, not permitting our felves, as far as lies within our power, to be blinded by any prejudices or prepossessions whatsoever.

Such an hearty and fincere defire of understanding what the Scriptures do require will not fail to put us upon fearthing diligently into the true meaning of them; it will naturally excite us to lay hold of all the proper means and opportunities we can come at to fatisfy our defires, and to pray for God's affistance in pursuing our endeavours. And when we think we are so happy as to make a clear discovery of the divine will concerning our faith, and our behaviour, the same dispofition of the heart will engage us to close with it, though it should prove ever so contrary to our former notions and opinions, to custom or authority, or whatever else is apt to pervert the judgment, and cast a mist before the understanding; for this is certain, that he who reads the Scripture with such a preparation of mind as I have here described, can have no eager inclination to find out some passages in it, by which he may be able the better to support his former pre-conceived opinions; but on the contrary, he will embrace the truth with equal pleasure, when he finds it contradicts them, as when it serves to countenance and confirm them.

John xiv.

This is that love of God which Jesus Christ hath promised to reward with a particular manisestation of himself, and his divine truths. He that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manisest my self to him — This is that happy qualification which intitles us to the beatistic vision; and to which Christ hath expressly promised all, and more than I contend for here. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Matt. v. 8.

This passage, I conceive, contains in it a full assurance, that God will manifest his will and pleasure in a peculiar manner to persons thus disposed; that when they search the Scriptures for the knowledge of their duty, and in the love of truth, they shall be sure to obtain a more persect understanding of it than others, not indued with this excellent disposition.

This may serve to explain the reason to us, why men of parts and learning are so often at a loss to find the truth, while others,

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of but very mean abilities, do fo clearly apprehend it; and why Christ hath told us, that his heavenly Father thought fit to bide Luke those weighty matters from the wife and pru-x. 21. dent, which, at the same time, he did vouchfafe to reveal unto babes in understanding, and in the knowledge of carnal and worldly things, and who had not their eyes blinded by the vain conceit of their own wisdom or learning. But if we take the bleffing mentioned as belonging to the pure in heart in the other fense, in which no doubt it ought also to be understood, viz. of enjoying God hereafter, this will not contradict the argument I build upon it, but rather it will be a further confirmation of the efficacy of this virtue, as it is most reasonable to presume, that God will shew the light of his Gospel in an especial manner, even in this present world, to those on whom he defigns hereafter to bestow the bleffings and rewards which are therein revealed and promised.

2. In order to a right understanding of his duty from the word of God, it behoves every Christian to make a diligent use of those means and opportunities which God hath put into his power. This is one of the natural and necessary consequences of that sincerity before spoken of; for, where-ever there is a sincere and earnest inclination to learn the meaning of those divine truths which God hath been pleased to reveal unto us, there must also of necessity be a diligent use of those means and opportunities

portunities which may help us to discover it.

THE negligent and careless persons who fit down contented with a transient flight enquiry into these matters, as they are unworthy of eternal life, so it is not to be wondered at, if they do not fee the way that leads directly to it, though the Scripture plainly marks it out to all those who are active and industrious in seeking for it. As eternal life is that rich and most invaluable treasure for which we are to fearch the Scriptures, fo 'tis extremely rational that our care and diligence should bear some proportion to the value and importance of it. These cannot be omitted in a matter of fo great concern to us, without the utmost folly and abfurdity. But,

WHEN a Christian hath employed his utmost diligence, and laid hold of all those
means and opportunities which he judges requisite for acquiring the knowledge of his
duty, will not God accept of his endeavours,
though he may still continue in the ignorance of many things, which possibly may
be very clearly understood by other persons?
Undoubtedly he will; and to affirm the contrary is most injurious and contradictory to
the idea which all men ought to entertain
of God, which is that of an infinitely just
and righteous, a most benign and gracious

Being.

"ALL Christians (says a very worthy Author) ought to use their best endeavours

to believe the Scripture in the true sense. "This, if they perform truly and fincerely, " it is impossible but that they should be-" lieve aright in all things necessary to " falvation; that is, in all those things " which appertain to the covenant between "God and man in Christ, for so much is " not only plainly, but frequently contain-" ed in Scripture. And believing aright " touching the covenant, if they for their coparts perform the condition required of " them, which is fincere obedience, why " should they not expect that God will or perform his promise and give them salva-" tion? For as for other things which lie " without the covenant, and are therefore " less necessary, if by reason of the seeming " conflict which is oftentimes between Scrip-" ture and reason, and authority, on the one " fide; and Scripture, reason, and autho-" rity, on the other; if by reason of the va-" riety of tempers, abilities, educations, and " unavoidable prejudices, whereby mens un-" derstandings are variously formed and fa-" shioned, they do embrace several opinions, " whereof fome must be erroneous, to fay " that God will damn them for such errors, " who are lovers of him, and lovers of truth, " is to rob man of his comfort, and God of " his goodness; it is to make man desperate, " and God a tyrant.*"

^{*} Chillingworth's Answer to the Preface, § 26.

To what is here offered on this argument it may possibly be objected, That one who strives, according to the utmost of his power, to gain a perfect understanding of his duty from the Scriptures, may come very short of what he now feeks for with great folicitude and most diligent concern, by reason of some former neglects of fuch proper means and opportunities, which if they had not passed away without a due attention and regard, he might have been much better qualified for this work; and God may justly punish such a wilful negligence and folly, by refusing now to communicate the knowledge of his will to him, though the fincerity of his prefent inclinations are accompanied with his best endeavours.

In answer to this objection 'tis granted, That fuch a wilful ignorance as is here fupposed, shall certainly be imputed to him as a fault, and as fuch it ought to be repented of. But then it must be noted, That upon the fincere acknowledgment of his guilt, and unfeigned repentance for it, the fin shall be forgiven him, and his future application to his duty will re-instate him in the favour of his God, by the express terms of the Gospel-covenant. If he had carefully improved all means, and laid hold of all seasonable opportunities for the better understanding of the holy Scriptures, he would have gain'd a more extensive knowledge of them, and thereby been enabled to discover in those divine repositories many profitable fitable truths which he cannot now dif-

This is not to be esteemed a punishment inflicted on him for his fault, it being in reality no other than the natural, and unavoidable consequence of his former carelesness. But though the past can never be recalled, nor the advantages he hath loft be thoroughly retrieved, yet of this we may be very confident. That God will fo far accept his fincerity, and regard his pious inclinations and endeavours, as to discover plainly to him those most important truths which are necessary to be known for the salvation of his soul; yea, and bless his present honest diligence, and his future perseverance in it, with greater measures of divine illumination, and degrees of wifdom and heavenly fruitions, in proportion to his industry, and the integrity of his heart

ALL revealed truths are not absolutely necessary to be known by every Christian. Of those to whom God hath given much, of them he will require so much more; and of every one according to the talents he bestows upon him. The wise and learned shall be accountable for greater improvements in spiritual knowledge than the ignorant and unlearned. They who have more leisure ought to employ a greater portion of their time in searching into these things; and for others who have less, it is sufficient to justify them before God, if they be careful to bestow such a portion of it in reading, or in hear-

ing the word of God, as they shall judge necessary, in a matter of such consequence, by their own prudence and discretion.

WHEN I lay down this, as one of those useful and most necessary rules, by which all Christians are to direct themselves, for the better understanding of their duty from. God's word, That they are to make a diligent use of all those means and opportunities which God affords them for that purpose, these words ought not to be construed in such a strict and rigid fense, as if I thought that no one could be held excusable before God, who doth not use the utmost possible endeavours through the whole course of his life; or, at least, from the time in which he feriously and heartily fets himself to learn his duty by the study of the Scriptures. I defire only, that the words may be understood in fuch an equitable and qualified fense, as all expressions of this nature are generally taken. The true intent of them will be fully answered, if a Christian uses such a faithful, diligent application of those means and opportunities which lie before him, as his reason and his conscience tells him he is obliged to do.

3. The next thing requisite to a right understanding of the Scriptures is, That he who sets himself to search into them, does it with a resolution sincerely to obey the will of God, as far as he can discover it

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upon his making such a search. If this be the principal end of our inquiries, as without dispute it always ought to be, we shall not meet with any great discouragement in the work, for whatever tends to practical religion is there so plainly to be seen, that he

who runs may read it.

WITHOUT this practical resolution the more knowledge a man attains to, the greater danger he incurs; for That servant who Luke xii] knew bis lord's will, and prepared not bim-47. felf, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. They who make it their main concern in perufing the Scriptures, to find in them that doctrine which is I Tim. according to godlines; who, as new-born i Pet. ii. babes, defire the fincere milk of the word, that 2.1 they may grow thereby; and who receive with meekness the ingrafted word, shall effectually perceive that it is able to fave their fouls. James il He who feeks only his falvation in the Scrip-21. ture, will find it there; and that knowledge too which he did not feek for in it: and he who fearches there only to fatisfy a vain defire of unedifying knowledge, may by so doing perhaps be puffed up with much vanity on conceit of his supposed great attainments, when, as to the main thing which ought to have been proposed before all things else, he is neither wifer nor better for any discoveries he may make in such a search. And they who read and study the Scriptures with a view and hope only to support by their authority some false and carnal (though

commonly receiv'd) opinions, are so far from being likely to meet with what they seek for, that they are in danger, through strong prejudice, of wilfully shutting their eyes against the truth, and wresting the Scriptures (to make them speak their own

corrupt sense) to their own destruction.

WHILE men delight to bufy themselves in making curious and unprofitable disquifitions only, 'tis no wonder if they meet with many doubts and difficulties in their way, and that they are frequently bewildered, and fometimes even loft in labyrinths of their own contriving; but if they study these books, as some have infolently done, on purpose to expose them, endeavouring to find out something false, absurd, or contradictory therein; throwing contempt upon the facred authors, and Ariving to raife a reputation to themselves upon the ruin of their credit; if they will thus impiously and audaciously presume to thwart the design of providence in publishing these writings, tis just in God to blast their hopes, and to bring difgrace upon them, in those performances, by which they strove to shine in men's opinion of their parts and learning. That God hath at any time judicially infa-tuated such persons, it would be rashness to pronounce, without authority from him. And yet the confusion and impertinence, the remarkable weakness and folly of feveral remarks to be met with in the works of some late writers of this fort, of a liberal

beral education, and talents not to be despised, would tempt one shrewdly to su-

spect it.

HE who fearcheth into the word of God with this view only, that he may be the better able to fulful his divine will and pleafure, fuch a one may depend upon God's promise, that he shall become both wifer and better for it. If any man will do his John vill will, be shall know of the doctrine, whether 17. it be of God. With such a disposition as this it becomes us always to confult the divine oracles, that we may attain to that which is the only end of our faith, even i Pet. i.g. the salvation of our souls. Whoever takes this method may be affured of a good fuccess; For if these things be in you, and 2 Pet. is abound, they make you that ye shall neither 8, 9. be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind.

4. The last particular which I design to recommend, as a necessary qualification for attaining to the knowledge of our duty by searching into the Scriptures, is, Prayer to God for his direction and assistance in it. This we find to be the constant practice of the holy psalmist, in his enquiries after the knowledge of God's laws; Make me to un-Psal. exist. derstand the way of thy precepts. Teach me, 27. O Lord, the way of thy statutes. Cause me to Psal. know the way wherein I should walk, for I lift exist.

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WE Christians have the greatest encouragement imaginable to put up our petitions to the throne of grace for this purpose, since Christ hath assured us before-hand,

Matt. vii. that God will not deny us our requests. Ask, in and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; in a knock, and it shall be opened unto you. And this was the constant advice of Christ's di-

James i. 5. sciples in the same case. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall

be given bim.

These are the several qualifications which I hold necessary for every one, who desires to attain to the true sense and meaning of the holy Scriptures, as far as his salvation is concerned. And as these are the only particulars which I judge necessary to recommend, so I hope that no one needs to question but they will be found effectual and sufficient means for that purpose. Human learning is not here reckoned as one of those necessary means by which the knowledge of eternal life is to be gained, and therefore no man hath any cause to fear that he shall lose his portion of it for the want of that.

THE holy Scripture is published in the vulgar language of our country, and whatever difficulties, or mistakes may be found in ours, as well as other versions of it, they are such as do not in the least affect the essential terms of the Gospel-covenant, which, as they are sull and comprehensive.

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THE Gospel was preach'd at first for the universal benefit of all mankind. The study of the Scriptures was approved of, allowed and recommended to all without distinction. And due care is taken in all countries, where the happy Reformation is established, to have it published in the language understood by all the people, so that no one can remain in ignorance of what that holy book contains, but through his own wilful and guilty negligence. It is a reasonable and practicable duty: If therefore this duty be neglected, no real incapacity can be pleaded in excuse for it. If a man be infincere in his defires, or flothful in his endeavours after true and faving knowledge; if he will not prepare himfelf to do the will of God, nor pray unto him for his direction and affiftance, his conscience never can acquit him from the guilt of wilful ignorance; the fin must lie at his own door; and his damnation comes from none but from himself.

THE providence of God hath made a rich and ample provision for every single person in all Protestant nations. The treasures of divine wisdom are there communicated to all alike; rich and poor, learned and unlearned, may have a plentiful portion. Every one that thirsteth may come to the waters of life, with which the Scriptures plentifully slow; and be that bath no money may there have wine and milk, without money

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The Christian Rule, &c.

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and without price. Let him hearken diligently unto the word of God, and he shall eat that which is good, and his foul shall delight it self in fatness: Let him hear, and his foul shall live; he shall receive the blessings of the everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David.

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DISCOURSE X.

The Christian Rule of Faith and Manners.

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JOHN v. 39.

Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life.

HE study of the holy Scriptures being that which, above all other studies and employments, will turn to the best account, and which, as Christians, we

are most especially oblig'd to follow, I have therefore most earnestly endeavoured to recommend it, by treating largely upon this very great and weighty subject. The great advantages we may reap from searching diligently into the word of God, have been largely treated of in the three foregoing discourses. In them I have endeavoured to demonstrate the sufficiency of holy Scripture,

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as to all essential articles of faith and manners. I have shewn that all these are therein contained in the sulless and clearest terms; and as a consequence of this, that nothing ought to be accounted necessary to salvation but what the Scripture so declares. Four things have been recommended to those who would search the Scriptures to their great advantage; which, as they are necessary for all men, however otherwise gisted or endowed, so they are sufficient of themselves to enable any one to discover plainly the way to life eternal.

I PROCEED now to the fifth and last head propounded, viz. to exhort all men to determine of their duty by the rule of Scripture, and carefully to study it. The arguments to enforce our care and diligence, in this great and most important work will be taken from the end and design of making such a search; from the easiness and practicableness of such an undertaking; from the assurance of success; and, from the example of Christ and his Apostles. Every one of which arguments or motives will receive its proper light and strength from the several topics of discourse which have been before examined and considered.

That by this we may discover the way to eternal life. In them ye think ye have eternal life. This is it which was unanimously agreed upon as a common principle between our Saviour and the Jews, in that controversy which

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gave occasion for this passage. When the fewish lawyer put the question to our Lord and Master, What shall I do to inherit eternal Luke x. life? The answer to it was, What is written 25 in the law? How readest thou?

In like manner, if a Christian seeks the way to heaven, 'tis in the Scripture where he may discover it with the greatest evidence and affurance. For obtaining that end it is his business to consult especially the writings of the holy Gospels, and those which have been added by the other facred writers to promote the same design. Let him study with proper care and application what is there committed to writing for compleat instruction in this weighty matter. It is a duty as absolutely necessary to him who seeks the way to happiness, as the only proper means are necessary to attain the end we hope to compass. By this duty, faithfully performed, we shall not fail plainly to discover what methods we must be sure to take, if we would fecure to our felves the greatest and most inestimable of all bleffings, everlasting life and happiness.

2. As a further motive to it, it may be proper to confider how easy the performance of this work is. The Scripture, as hath been largely shewn, doth not only contain all things necessary to salvation, as it is the most exact and perfect rule we have to go by, for the true measure of our duty both in faith and manners, but the method also which it marks out for us is most easy and practicable,

as all useful and most necessary doctrines are therein plainly and clearly revealed; and that no higher qualifications are required in any person towards a competent understanding of it in what concerns his own salvation, but those which every one either hath, or may have, if he has the care of his immortal soul sincerely at his heart.

No man can be destitute of any thing before-mentioned as absolutely necessary to this work, unless he hath, and doth continue most wilfully and wickedly to disqualify himself. It is not a matter which any way depends upon great wit or learning, or any eminence of station, from which the common multitude are excluded; but whatever is required from any one is in the power of every fincere and well-disposed person. "Tis a very practicable duty which men are here exhorted to. If they look into the Scriptures for the way to life eternal, and find it not, the fault must lie at their own doors; it can proceed from nothing else but their own wilful failure in such things as plainly lay within their power; because they did it not with fincerity and impartiality, with care and diligence, with a full purpose of obedience, and prayer to God for the divine affiftance. Here is not therefore the least hardship or severity laid on any one; not one circumstance of discouragement; but all things tending to invite men to the study of the sacred writings. And this will appear further,

3. From the affurance of success in such an undertaking. The ease and pleasantness of any method which can be proposed, I own is not sufficient of it self to recommend it to our practice, if it be not also well adapted to bring about the end we aim at. But if it be not only more easy and practicable than any other, but more effectual too for attaining that which is intended by it, I see nothing farther to be added in its commendation.

In vain do we feek the full and perfect knowledge of our duty in the way to life eternal, if we cannot find it in the Scriptures. All other means are certainly defective. The writings and discourses of weak and fallible men can never come in competition with these books. They are generally mixed with many faults and imperfections; with great uncertainty and obscurity; with much prejudice and partiality; very often with inconsistencies, and the most palpable contradictions, when they speak of life eternal as not founded on the Scripture promises.

Our Christian hopes, as founded on the Scripture promises, are not weaken'd by any such obscurities or inconsistencies; they are clear and uniform, and most consistent with themselves, in all those great and most important articles in which eternal life is more immediately concerned; so that if we duly seek it, as before directed, we shall meet with sull and certain information. Who can explain

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explain the mind and will of God, but God himself? To whom hath he revealed it, if not to Christ his only Son? Who then can give a clearer and fuller explanation of it than Jesus Christ, and they who had been perfonally instructed by him; and who after his departure from them were committed to the protection and affiftance of God's infallible Spirit, of whom their Lord had given affu-John xvi. rance to them, that he should come and guide them into all truth? Who came according to this promise, and miraculously indued them with fuch divine powers as did inable them fuccessfully to reveal and propagate all those truths in which themselves had been so perfectly instructed. Here therefore if we seek the knowledge of our duty, being so qualified and disposed as hath been before-men-

> 4. As a further motive to induce men diligently and carefully to fearch the Scriptures, it will be proper to confider the great examples which are given us in this matter,

> tioned, we may be confident that we shall

both by Christ and his Apostles.

not meet with any disappointment.

Our Lord himself did commonly appeal to Scripture, not only in the passage now before us, but almost in every controversy which he had with any of his adversaries: By this he refuted the vain traditions of the Yewish doctors; by this he filenced the cavils of the Scribes and Pharisees; and, when the devil would have wrested the Scripture to his evil purposes, Christ turned the edge of

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that sword against him, replying upon him from the word of God, and telling him, It Matt. is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy Deut. vi. God. And again, Thou shalt worship the 16.

Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou Ver. 10. Ver. 13.

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THE same authority was principally infifted on by his Apostles and Disciples. Out of the antient Scriptures Philip thought he could produce the certain evidences of our Saviour's mission; by them he laboured to convince Nathaniel, telling him, that they John i. had now found bim of whom Moses in the law, 4,5. and the Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the fon of Joseph. From thence the proto-Acts vii. martyr Stephen fetch'd all his arguments to justify himself, and, if possible, to convince his persecutors. And when Peter and his Chap. ii. brethren converted such vast numbers to the 14, &c. Christian faith upon the day of Pentecost, he did not rely only upon the miraculous effusion of the Holy Ghost, and the wonders consequent upon it, but he pleaded the cause of Christianity by many proofs and arguments taken from the Old Testament in confirmation of it.

In like manner the great Apostle St. Paul insisted mainly upon this evidence, with those who knew the writings of Moses and the Prophets. We are told, that he and Silas Chap. came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue xvii. 1, 2, of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and

Acts xxvi. 6. and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ. In his eloquent oration before the Roman governors he appealed frequently to the Scriptures for the support of his faith, and the doctrines he had preached unto the people; declaring that he stood, and was judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto their Fathers: And professing that he

Ver. 22. said no other things than those which the Pro-Ver. 27. phets and Moses did say should come. And thus it was that he closed up that admirable discourse; King Agrippa, believest thou the Prophets? I know that thou believest. With these powerful and convincing proofs the Apostle had so strenuously vindicated his faith, that the king himself confessed,

Ver. 28. He had almost persuaded him to be a Chri-

stian.

Chap. WE are more than once informed conxxviii. 23 cerning this Apostle, that to reason with the
Chap.
xviii. 2, 18. people out of the Scriptures was his customaxviii. 2, 18. practice. Philip the deacon also by inter27, &c. preting, and arguing from the Scripture,
converted the Ethiopian eunuch to the Chri-

Chap. Stian faith. The eloquent Apollos is charaxviii. 24 Cherised as a man mighty in the Scriptures. And how serviceable that talent was in making converts to Christianity we are told in

Ver. 28. the same place; For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the Scriptures, that Jesus was Christ.

To the Scriptures the wise and ingenuous Bereans had recourse for the more clear dis-Acts xvii. covery of the truth, or credibility of those 10, 8%. doctrines which Paul and Silas had published and defended in their synagogue. And this is recorded by the divine historian to

their immortal reputation.

In the facred Scriptures we have not only the brightest light for the discovery of our final happiness, and those Christian duties by which we shall be able to attain it with the greatest certainty; but there we have the strongest arguments, and most compulsive motives to pursue vigorously the felicity which we hope for, by an uniform and steady perseverance in all those duties. And for our better information and encouragement, we have therein also the most persect examples to lead the way before us; the Apostles and primitive Disciples, and our blessed Lord himself.

This appealing always to the Scriptures will give great ease and satisfaction to the minds of those who are apt to be distracted in the choice of their religion, by reason of that strange variety of opinions, which are, in truth, so very contradictory to one another; and in which both the opposite parties, who contend with much eagerness about some disputable point of doctrine are very often wide of what the Scripture plainly teaches.

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HERE it was, and here only, that the excellent Mr. Chillingworth could fatisfy his doubtdoubting conscience, after several changes in

his religion.

"I, For my part (says he) after a long, and (as I verily believe and hope) impartial search of the true way to eternal hapif piness, do profess plainly that I cannot find any rest for the sole of my foot, but

" upon this rock only "."

In contriving and imposing creeds and fystems of religion, they who presided in those affairs began too early to depart from Scripture language. This licentious boldness yielded precedents, and gave a plausible pretence to superstitious and designing men in future ages, for introducing much corruption, and great distractions in the Christian church.

HAD the fathers convened at the famous council of Nice been so wise and considerate, as to follow the advice of the emperor Confantine the Great +, in solving all the questions in dispute by the divinely inspired writings, it would probably have been more effectual in establishing peace and harmony in the church, and would certainly have prevented those heats and misconstructions of each others sentiments which enfued upon their taking a quite contrary method.

'Tis a very common objection in the mouths of Papists, and others who tread too closely

^{*} Chillingworth's Works, p. 290. † Theodorit. E. H. lib. 1. c. 7. Ex Al Jeogree's an Koyar Azeauer Al Insueran that Augus.

in their steps, That the free and unrestrained use of Scripture is the occasion of many wild enthusiastic notions in religion; and that it opens a way to schism and heresy. They therefore think that some restraint may, not unjustly, be imposed upon the laity, and especially the illiterate and lower rank of

people in this matter,

THERE is no doubt but fuch as these may fometimes misinterpret, or pervert the sense of Scripture; but when the danger of so doing is offered as a reason to abridge them of their liberty, the argument destroys it self, because it proves too much; for men in sacred offices, and persons of the greatest fame for human learning, by mistaking, or wilfully perverting the sense of Scripture, have been equally guilty with other persons, if not more than others in a schismatical behaviour, and in framing and promoting heretical opinions. And confequently, if the danger of heterodox notions, either as to faith or practice, be a sufficient reason to restrain the common people from consulting Scripture at their pleasure, it will as strongly prove, that the learned themselves, of what order or degree foever, ought also to be under the very same restraint; and thus our Bibles must entirely be laid aside.

Some of the antient fathers, with great truth and judgment, have affirmed, what few, if any confiderable persons, among Protestants, will venture to deny, That the Scripture is that unerring rule, by which all man-

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ner of disputes and controversies in religion always ought to be decided. If this therefore be the only method of curing or preventing all such errors and false principles as are apt to create, or continue fuch disorders in the church, as some complain of; then certainly it cannot be the cause of them, no more than the only proper remedy can be faid to be the cause of his disease, for whose

relief it was provided.

A VERY little observation will ferve to shew a Protestant of competent understanding, and some knowledge in the fystems of religion, and ways of worship, as professed and practifed in our own, and other countries in these parts of Christendom, that the greatest errors are there found, where the greatest restraints are laid upon Christians in the use of their Bibles; or where the private spirit is set up in opposition to the letter of it.

If fearthing the Scriptures be the proper and most effectual means to gain the knowledge how eternal life may be obtained, it is not likely to be the cause of wild enthusiaftical conceits; of herefies; or of diffurbing the church's peace; unless it be true, that wild conceits, herefies, schisms, and turbulent behaviour, can be faid to be the way to eternal life.

THE Papists, on the one hand, have a great number of unwritten traditions, which they pretend to have derived from Christ and his Apostles, and which they vary as they see occasion, and yet equal their authority with the written word. And as for what is written in the Law and the Gospel, they hold it unfase to be trusted in the hands of every Christian; in its room therefore they have set up a living infallible guide whose dictates they will have to be obeyed at least with equal reverence as the word of God.

THEY who pretend immediate inspiration by the Holy Ghost, do in like manner depreciate the sacred writings as a dead letter, and very insufficient to inform us in all the necessary points of duty, without the special affistance of such an inward revelation or manifestation of the divine will, conveyed im-

mediately to the fouls of men.

If the Scriptures contain all things necesfary to faith and manners, then there can be no necessity of adding any thing by way of supplement; for to that which is perfect nothing can be wanting. And if they are delivered in such clear and plain expressions, as every rational person, using common industry, and those natural powers and faculties with which his Maker hath endued him, may perceive the meaning of them, then what occasion is there of an infallible interpreter, or any other manifestation of the sense of Scripture than what is this way to be gain'd?

THE common people, under the tyrannical jurisdiction of the See of Rome, on pretence of the imperfection and obscurity of Scripture, are debarred of the most sacred

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rights and privileges which belong to them either as they are men, or as they are Christians, reason, and the Gospel; both which they must presume to use in their religious disquisitions so far, and in such a manner only as their ecclefiaftical superiors will permit. This furely is no good fign of the honesty and good intention of those who take upon them to direct their consciences, when they refuse to execute that office on any other terms than an absolute refignation of their judgments to what their leaders shall declare

WE need no better proof of the falle do-

as necessary for them to believe or act.

Arines, and finister defigns of Popish teachers, than that they dare not, in all the controverses in religion, abide the test of Scripture evidence, and acquiesce in plain indisputable proofs, when they are produced from thence. Have we not great reason to suspect that they are defirous to conceal the truth, when, like the Jewish lawyers whom our Saviour censured for it, by prohibiting the Luke xi. common use of Scripture, they take away the key of knowledge? If they were not themfelves distrustful of their cause, they would not thus industriously shun the light of holy Scripture. He who is conscious that the truth is on his fide will never be afraid of fuch a trial; but it is natural for the guilty to hide and conceal their errors from the fight of men. Every one that doth evil bateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. And the wilfully erro-

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John iii. 20.

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neous will do the very same, lest their errors be discovered.

To take away the Gospel from a Christian, who is God's adopted fon through Jesus Christ, is to deprive him of those deeds and records whereby he claims his title to that eternal inheritance, which makes him an beir of God, and joint beir with Christ. Rom. viii. Heaven is that purchased possession which our 17. Lord obtained for all who faithfully believe in him, and live in a strict conformity to his laws. All therefore who are intitled to the benefit of that purchase, have a right to confult at pleasure those writings by which this bleffed legacy was convey'd. No human laws with justice can be made, to restrain the multitude of believers from the free use of that which belongs in common to them all by a divine right; which right also, fince it is unquestionably divine, no Christian, without offence to the heavenly donor, can confent to part with.

THE Romanists, in taking away the Bible from the common people, are so far from copying after the good example of the antient Christians in this particular, that they act the part of Heathens; nay, of Heathen perfecutors too; for in the bitter persecutions which the primitive Christians underwent from Pagan tyrants, the compelling them to deliver up their Bibles was looked upon as one of their greatest and most intolerable afflictions, and even worse than death it self. And they, who for fear of fufferings com-N 3

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plied herein, were generally confidered as persons renouncing their religion, and apostatizing from the Christian faith. Those timorous Christians who submitted in this manner were most severely censured in the ecclesiastical histories of those times, tho they were driven to it by the utmost terrors, to save their lives, or to rescue their bodies from insufferable torments.

This may ferve to shew us, by the way, That the reading of the Scriptures was the known privilege of the common people in those early ages of the church; and moreover, that it was judged their strictest duty fo to do, or else no reason can be given, why they should be so accounted of, for parting with those books ---- Again, if the Heathen governors were to blame in offering this violence to those whom they look'd upon as impious persons and mere atheists, what shall we say of them who compel their Fellow-Christians to the same thing, under the like, or, perhaps, more cruel treatment? And can it possibly be thought a more reasonable thing, to abstain from consulting the Code of divine laws at the command of Christian, than of Heathen tyrants?

THE denying the free use of Scripture, and the liberty which every man may justly claim of judging for himself by that rule, is a contradiction to every sacred principle we profess, either as Christians, or as Protestants, or as members

of the church of England in parti-

IT is against the principles of Christianity in general; for without that liberty the Christian religion could never have gained any footing in the world; and many arguments infifted on by Christ and his Apo-Ales for the conviction of the Jews would have been useless and impertinent - It is against the Principles of the Reformation, which was manifestly begun, and carried on upon the very contrary presumption. It was by afferting the right of every Christian without distinction, to read and determine of his duty by the Scriptures, that our glorious Reformers found a way to free themselves at first from the grievous yoke of Papal tyranny. And it must be by infisting stoutly upon this common privilege of all believers, that we shall be able to keep our necks from being brought again under that yoke, which they found so insupportable --- It is against the principles of the church of England in particular, as appears by her articles of religion, by her common liturgy, by her offices of ordination, and confecration of priefts and bishops, and by her doctrine more largely delivered and explained in the book of homilies.

'Tis most evident, that, without asserting such a Christian liberty, a member of this church can plead but little for serving God according to the dictates of his con-

fcience in other countries, where a way of worship contrary to his judgment happens to be established. All persons have an equal right to the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament. The law was published in the hearing of all the people; and Christ did frequently direct his discourse to the common multitude, when he appealed to the authority of their antient Scriptures.

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THE Gospels were not written by the holy pen-men for the instruction of the Apoftles, who had their information from the mouth of Christ himself; they were published for the benefit of the whole Chri-John xx. Stian church in general, that they might believe that Jesus is the Christ; and that believing they might have life through his name ____ The Epistles likewise were not addressed peculiarly to the bishops and deacons, but to all the holy brethren, Even those directed more particularly to Timothy and Titus were for the common use and benefit of all the faithful, as every ordinary reader will discern, by the multitude of other precepts contained in them, besides those which concern the office of a bishop or teacher of the word.

This is your great happiness and advantage, your common right and privilege. The duties of the Gospel concern you all alike; you are all alike obliged to faith, repentance, and obedience; you have all of you immortal fouls to fave; the pains of hell

or the joys of heaven will be the lot of every one of you. And if so, then certainly it concerns you all to know, and judge of your condition, whether you are like to meet with one or other of them.

In our communion your right of judging for your felves is not invaded, nor the facred treasury of the Scriptures lock'd up from you. 'Tis a shame therefore, if, by your own wilful negligence, you deprive your felves of these inestimable benefits. As the Apostles declared of old, that they kept nothing back from the other disciples, which was profitable for them to believe or practice; so we the ministers of this reformed church may justly make the same profession while we go by its known and most unexceptionable rule of teaching; for we are oblig'd by feveral articles of our church, and have oblig'd our felves to teach no other doctrine, as of necessity to salvation, but what the Scripture teaches; especially when we are willing to refer you, for your fuller fatisfaction, and are defirous that the rectitude of our notions and opinions should be always measured by the same rule, according as you your selves shall judge of it, after the best information you can get to understand it rightly.

Ir therefore you defire to know the will of heaven, be careful always to consult the lively oracles, which are not like the *Heathen* oracles of old, doubtful, equivocal, and obscure, but full and clear in all the most

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necessary points, so that you can never walk in darkness while you follow their direction; they will prove a lamp unto your feet, and a lanthorn to your paths; they will guide you safely into the way of truth and peace, and are sufficient of themselves to make you wise unto salvation.

Ir the Scriptures are so full, as to admit of no additions, and so clear, that they stand in need of no authoritative interpreter to make them useful, even to the meanest Christians, then it is their sole authority to which our

chief regard ought always to be paid.

HE who takes the holy Scripture for his only guide hath no reason to be terrified by any sentence which may be denounced against him by his fellow-creatures: He is not bound to submit his conscience to any authority besides that of Christ, nor to give assent to any other doctrines but those only which are plainly taught him in the holy Scriptures, and which his reason tells him may be certainly inferr'd from thence.

No articles, canons, or injunctions, no declarations or decrees of men are to be received or credited, as effential branches of our faith, any further than they are found in, deduced from, and intirely confonant to the holy Scriptures; and even then our submiffion is due to them only by virtue of God's authority — All human impositions may be very safely rejected by any private Christian, while he is persuaded in his conscience, after a careful and impartial examination,

that

that they are contrary to, and cannot possibly be warranted and maintained by the word of God. But whatever is evidently contained in those venerable pages, and whatsoever your own reason tells you is wholly conformable thereunto, let that be your study; there pay your best regards; adhere firmly to those truths; and have a mind always ready and prepared to receive with meekness the ingrasted word, which is able to save your souls.





DISCOURSE XI.

The Duty of examining into the Truth and Reasonableness of Religion.

I THESS. v. 21.

Prove all Things: Hold fast that which is good.



T is a violent infult upon the reason and understanding of men, to obtrude any thing upon them, as a necessary article of their faith, without endea-

vouring to convince their judgments, that it is a truth which hath been revealed from heaven, and that God requires their belief of it on pain of his displeasure.

THE great Apostle, in the two preceding verses, having admonished the *Thessalonians* not to oppose the persons or proceedings, nor

any ways to obstruct the ministry, by neglecting or despising either the ordinary, or uncommon gifts of those who came to inftruct or warn them concerning the knowledge or practice of religion, it was requifite at the same time to add this precept by way of caution to them. Many false Prophets were even then gone out among them, he therefore bids them not to be too credulous in giving ear to all pretenders, but to be upon their guard against all impostors, neither regarding the persons, nor embracing the doctrines of those who took upon them to govern and direct their consciences, as persons gifted and inspired for that purpose, without fufficient evidences of their mission, and of the truth and usefulness of what they taught. The like warning was also given to the Asiatic Christians by saint John, Beloved, be- 1 John iv. lieve not every spirit, but try the spirits, whe-1. ther they are of God: Because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

Or this very thing their Master had forewarned his own Apostles, intimating plainly, that they themselves, as well as many others, might possibly be deceived by false Matt. prophets coming in his name before the de-xxiv. 4, struction of Jerusalem, unless they took espe-5, &c. cial care to mark the figns which he had pointed out concerning that affair, Impoftors, he tells them, would come with appearances of authority, fo very specious, that without great vigilance and circumspection they would not be able to avoid the

fnare;

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snare; well therefore might common Christians be presumed to be in great danger of

deception.

THIS cautionary advice was given univerfally to all the faithful by Christ's Apostles, without intending to exempt themselves, or any of their brethren, from the like examination. St. Paul, 'tis certain, never claim'd this privilege, to be credited upon his own bare word, by any persons whom he had not first convinc'd, by giving them sufficient proofs of his authority. In disputing with the Fews he draws his arguments from the Law, and the Prophets, as he did with the Gentiles from the law of nature, appealing always to fuch kind of evidence as was most proper for the conviction of those to whom his writings or discourses were delivered, upon the common principles in which both parties were perfectly agreed.

When he preach'd the word in Thessalonica, where he converted several both of the
fews and Greeks to the Christian faith, he
did not take upon him arbitrarily to impose
that faith upon them, but submitted to the
free determination of their judgments. He
did not call upon them in a dogmatical and
imperious manner, to believe and practise
whatever he himself should think fit and
reasonable to prescribe, but left them, as he
did all others, to a free, impartial examination of the matter, and to be concluded by
their own reason, and the judgment they
should make upon the evidence that appear-

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ed. To this he dorh appeal, in the beginning of this letter, for the truth or credibility of what he taught them, calling to their remembrance the fubstantial proofs he had given of his apostolic mission, which they well knew had been confirm'd from heaven by the miraculous powers he had exercifed among them; and which also, very probably, had been communicated in a good measure even to some among themselves. For our Gos-Chap. i. pel came not unto you, fays he, in word only, 5. but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much affurance. This, we may observe, must have been a very proper introduction to whatever doctrines he had further to declare unto them, well fitted to engage their attention, and fo much the more to regard and credit what he might intend to write in his epistle to those proselytes. After this he takes occasion to exhort them, by the strictest vigilance, to guard against imposture and mistake in matters of religion, by this cautionary precept, Prove all things: Hold fast that which is good. The doctrine herein contain'd doth plainly confift of these two parts,

First, THAT it is every man's duty to examine into the reasons and proofs of his religion.

Secondly, To adhere constantly to that faith, which he hath, upon a fair enquiry, seen good and sufficient reason to embrace, and is not found to be er-

roneous,

First, It is every man's duty to examine into the reasons and proofs of his religion. In discussing this particular, I shall,

I. ENDEAVOUR to confirm and explain

the proposition.

e propolition.
2. I SHALL shew, that it concerns all Christians indifferently to make proof of their religion by fuch examination. And,

3. I SHALL inquire more particularly into the subject matter of this examina-

tion.

1. I SHALL endeavour to confirm and ex-

plain the reason of the proposition.

As it is an argument of a most desperate and heedless disposition, for a man rashly to reject that which is proposed to him as a matter of the utmost importance to his safety, without giving himself the trouble to deliberate about it; fo, on the other hand, it argues great weakness, and very gross credulity in any one, to give his affent immediately to every thing that is offered to him, without inquiring carefully, whether it hath fufficient ground of certainty, or probability to rest upon. Such irrational behaviour is below the dignity of human nature. idiot, or a child, may do as much as this amounts to. However God may, and will dispense with those whom he hath not indued with the faculty of reasoning, or the organs of whose bodies may obstruct the operations of of their souls, or who are not yet arrived at an age of understanding; yet it cannot be expected that he should deal with others in the same manner, who wilfully neglect to use the talents he hath given them, in things of the highest importance to his service. If he hath enriched them with reason, and an understanding sitted for such inquiries, 'tis a vain presumption to think he will accept their service when they come before him with the sacrifice of sools.

RELIGION is the act of a man's own free choice; and this is fo true, that whatever is not fuch is fo far from being any act of religion, that, in propriety of speech, it cannot be accounted a human action. very certain, that in matters of a moral and religious nature, every one ought to form a judgment to himself of what is rational and fit for him to believe and do: and if he acts upon any principle at all, it is impossible he should do otherwise. Whatfoever any one pretends to give affent to, otherwise than upon this foundation, can never be acceptable to Almighty God; it may be called credulity, or what you please, but faith it certainly cannot be *.

It is no matter what ceremonies are kept up, what way of worship is observed, what

[&]quot;Ο ໄδία περαιρέσει ων αγαθός "ον ως αγαθός ές τη, δ δε υφ έτερου ανάγκης αγαθός γενόμεν Θ- "οι ως εκ ες τη, δτι μη ιδία περαιρέσει ές τη δές τη. Clementina Hom. 11. cap. 8.

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exercises are performed, or austerities undergone by one, who never took it into his confideration to examine the reasonablenels of all, or any of these things; both his belief, and practice too, are infignificant, as to any good end and purpose, while he hath no proofs on which to ground his faith, and to thew that his actions are conformable to the will of God: For ought that fuch a one can tell, that which he calls his faith may be no better than a false, or, perhaps, heretical opinion: What he takes to be an act of religious worship may be something which is finful and most abominable in the fight of God; and whether it proves fo, or otherwife, it is all hap-hazard. We may conclude therefore, that fuch a behaviour can never procure favour and acceptance at God's hand. 'Tis not conceivable that infinite wisdom should have a very tender regard for those careless persons who have no more concern for their own happiness.

What is the reason that God hath not required religious worship to be paid him by any part of the creation, except those beings only whom he hath endowed with an understanding mind, with souls capable of discerning those things which are of a moral nature? And, why hath he commanded that all creatures, furnished with such powers and capacities, should revere and worship him? Is it not plainly this, that nothing truly is an act of religion, but what proceeds

from reason and reflection? And that it is the duty of every man to examine into the reasons of his religion, we may conclude from hence, that God hath furnished him with proper powers to that intent.

2. I SHALL shew, that it concerns all Christians indifferently to make proof of

their religion by fuch examination.

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A More compleat evidence of this truth cannot reasonably be defired, than that which is contained in the text it felf. If we confider the place in which it stands, it will afford us a plain demonstrative proof that all Christians, what rank soever they may be of, whatever qualifications they are indued with, are concerned in it. The Apostle doth not here address himself in particular to men of birth and education, to the wife and learned, to the rulers and elders of the people, or to the clergy, as they are now called, in contradistinction to the multitude of their Christian brethren; but to the whole fociety of believers, to the church of the Chap.i.1] Thessalonians, which is in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ; as he declares in the very entrance to this epiftle. Nay, so far is he from excluding the common people from the privilege and liberty of examining and judging for themselves in matters of religion, that if we cast our eyes upon the 12th and 13th verses of this very chapter, we shall find it clear beyond difpute, that he directs his admonitions more peculiarly to them; for there he speaks to the

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the whole body of the faithful, as diftinguish'd from those who were placed over them in the Lord: and at the conclusion

Ver. 27. he charges them, that this epiftle should be

read unto all the holy brethren.

THE same liberty was granted, the same kind of exhortation given likewise by faint Peter to every ordinary Christian, that he should search into the grounds and reasons of his faith, and that by fo doing he might

1 Pet. iii. 15. be ready always to give an answer to every man that (hould ask a reason of the bope that was in him. Agreeably to this advice faint Paul also thus admonishes the Corintbian

2Cor. xiii. people, Examine your selves, whether ye be 5. in the faith: Prove your own selves. And what have we to produce on the other fide? Is there any one passage in the whole New Testament, which restrains the whole body of Christian people, the ministers and governors only excepted, from making fuch enquiries? Is there any one rule laid down, from whence it can be gathered, that fuch a liberty is denied to any member of the church? So little reason have we to maintain a notion fo injurious to the flock of Christ, that the whole tenor of the Gospel shews the contrary. St. John declares ex-

John i. 9. presly concerning Christ, That be was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And our Lord con-Chap. viii. 12. firms this testimony of himself. It was not xii. 46. therefore only the Apostles and Prophets, and Evangelists, whose understandings he

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defigned to illuminate with the light of his glorious Gospel; his intention evidently was, that no one should be kept in darkness, but that all should come to the knowledge of the Tim. truth.

RELIGION must have its proper station in the head, as well as in the heart. Nothing will be owned as perfect in religion, but where there is a full concurrence both of the will, and of the understanding too. So far from truth is that most ridiculous and filly faying, Ignorance is the mother of devotion, that the reverse of it hath the justest title to that character. In contradiction to that foolish proverb it is very certain, That where no competent degree of knowledge is, there cannot possibly be any true devotion. Ignorance is indeed the mother of superstition; and this, we must confess, is but too commonly mistaken for devotion. A County and and

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THERE is a vast disproportion in men's understandings and capacities. Upon this account some presume to claim a most unjustifiable superiority over those of mean and slow parts, who also want the benefit of a liberal education, pretending that such as these are obliged blindly to submit themselves to the guidance of their teachers in matters of religion; and that they are bound to conform themselves both in faith and manners, if not to their dictates, yet at least to the articles and canons of the church, though

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they

they are not able to comprehend the truth or meaning of them; and though they may appear to them either falle or doubtful at the least. Thus ignorant, well-meaning perfons are often terrified with many scruples and perplexities concerning their duty to God, and one another; and they are more especially troubled and confounded, when matters of speculation, expressed in dark scholastic terms, are laid before them, as containing fundamental articles of religion, which they must acknowledge and receive as fuch, on pain of their damnation, But let not any unlearned persons be discouraged when they hear fuch things, the Lord descended down from heaven with a gracious intention to promote their happiness, as well as that of others; his commission extended in particular to them. It was one distinguishing character of the Messiah, that he was appointed to this office, and that he came to preach the Gofpel to the poor; and God was pleased, by his ministry, to reveal those things to them, which at first were bid

Matt. xi. 5.

Ver. 25.

from the wife and prudent.

THUS much, I hope, may be sufficient for the proof of this point, That it concerns all Christians, without distinction, to make proof of their religion, by examining into the truth and reason of it. But in order to make this thing, if possible, still more

clear,

is. I SHALL inquire more particularly into the subject matter of this examination, that we may fee distinctly what that is which every Christian is bound to believe and practife; and what fort of evidence will be sufficient to render his religion acceptable to his Maker in Aughorand sonato Lant F. Sav

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THAT which frightens, and much discourages men of plain and ordinary understandings, from fearthing into the grounds and reasons of their Christian faith, is the mighty jarring and disputing which they see daily amongst men of learning and great abilities: If these cannot agree about the truth, the unlearned are apt to think it is not very likely that fuch as they are should ever be able to discover it. They cannot but perceive that the house and family of Christ is miserably divided against it self; that they who go under the general denomination of Christians are most lamentably torn into innumerable fects and factions; that not only the western is distinguish'd from the eastern parts of Christendom, by a set of principles and practifes extremely different from each other; but that the western church is again fubdivided, and broken into innumerable parties, and differing communions, excluding one another from their affemblies; and that every nation, and ours in particular, abounds in such as these. Every one of these opposite fraternities doth not stick most confidently to affirm, that they are in the right; -odlib

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right; one society crying out, that the truth is evidently to be found with them; and all those of the opposite persuasion asserting confantly with like assurance, that it is certainly on their side; and that the method they are in is the readiest and safest way to heaven. This, I cannot but observe, with grief and pity towards mankind, is the occasion of great uneasiness and distraction to men of weak minds and mean attainments; and not to these only, but to many others also, who are not in the lowest rank of parts and under-

standing, from bon painted to som dipaons

I TAKE it therefore to be a work of charity, and do hope it may be of service to the interest of religion, a means to unite us in the common faith, and in perfect love and charity towards one another, notwithstanding these unhappy differences, if I shall be able to convince you, that it is not necessary to falvation to concern your felves with these debates. That which I shall observe in general upon it, for your greater fatiffaction is, that the warmest and fiercest of these disputes is not for the maintenance of those doctrines, which are clearly and certainly revealed in Scripture, and the belief of which is indispensably required from every Christian. But all this furious and violent contention is only about matters merely circumstantial to religion, and to propagate the fentiments and opinions of private men; most of which may be either credited, or difbe-

difbelieved, without any prejudice to the effentials of it. lod being brain whom man der

THE difference between us and the church of Rome, I own, is of a higher nature, because many of their tenets are destructive to the very vitals of Christianity. If their errors and corruptions had not been fo very gross, and were more tolerable in themfelves, vet fince none can be admitted to communion with them, but upon the hard conditions of refigning up their consciences to be directed in a very arbitrary manner by their spiritual guides, and renouncing their allegiance to the divine lawgiver, whenever any of his laws or precepts, even in the plainest cases, may appear contrary to what hath been determined by his pretended vicar, or by a council of their ecclefiaftical superiors; no persons who desire to maintain their Christian liberty can be too cautious of paying any manner of submission to fuch a grievous and tyrannical usurpation. But, nieriso, man

In all other focieties of Christian worshippers, where the Scriptures are allowed to be the only rule of faith and manners, and we are left to the free exercise of our understandings in judging of our duty, there the case is not so very desperate; for though it cannot be denied, that even among these the constitution of some churches is vastly preferable to that of others, yet the difference in it felf is not near so wide between some of the

most

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most numerous and prevailing parties, as 'tis too commonly represented both in verbal controversies, and polemic writings; sometimes through mistake and want of judgment; very often, as there is too much reason to suspect, through selfish views, the private interests and passions of those who are

engaged in fuch disputes an allow has calous

Gop hath fet up two great lights for our direction in matters of religion, natural reafon, and the holy Bible. If we carefully follow these lights they will guide us safely to our journey's end. These lights, indeed, may thine with greater brightness to some persons than to many others; but they are not fo dim to any one of common understanding, as not to shew him with sufficient clearness the way that leads unto his final happiness; if he seeks diligently for it in the way which they discover, and pursues it with a constant perseverance, he will certainly overtake it. Since both these lights proceed from God, it is very certain that they are never contrary to one another; from whence it follows, that fuch interpretations of the Scripture as do plainly contradict our reason cannot possibly be true.

REASON directs us to the knowledge of God, and his effential attributes; and by his word we are more fully instructed in the particulars of his will, and the peculiar sanctions by which he hath enforc'd it. The light of reason teacheth us to believe and

know,

know, That there is a God, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently feek him. The whole world is a book in which we may read the author of it, and every part of it is inscribed with the characters of his divine power and wisdom.

ALL men are not born to be great philosophers; but, bleffed be God! he hath made known his being and his providence in fo intelligible a manner, that it doth not require any great depth or extraordinary reach of understanding, to know that the world is not a necessary, or self-existent being, since there is not any contradiction in supposing that it never might have had existence, but that it owes its origin to an infinite and all powerful agent as the cause and author of it; and that it is upheld, and governed by the continual care and inspection of him that made it. And fince we our felves are the principal inhabitants of that part of the creation with which we are acquainted, 'tis not to be supposed but that our Maker takes a more particular care of us; and confequently, that he will call us to account concerning our behaviour. It is very natural to conclude further, from these first principles of human reason, that seeing God takes cognizance of our actions; that we shall be accountable to him for them; I say, it is very natural to conclude from hence, that he would make some particular revelation of his will and pleasure to us, by which we might

might understand more clearly after what manner he would be served and worshipped by us. And if it be highly reasonable to think that he would do so, the next step is to consider, whether he hath not actually made such a revelation of his will. This inquiry leads us, by another easy step, to the knowledge of his holy word, as we have it in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament; for the Bible, we are told, is that book which he caused to be written for that very

purpole, out and word or parametrical in to

THE Old Testament was confirmed with many wonders by Moles and the Prophets. And Christ hath evidenced the truth of his Gospel by more, and greater miracles, than those were. Besides all this, there was a confiderable number of clear propheties delivered in the writings of Moles and the Prophets, and in the Pfalms concerning Christ, of his birth, and life, and sufferings; and all these having been verified and fulfilled in him, there is no room to doubt and call in question his divine authority: But especially, when he shewed the greatest of all miracles, and made good what he had prophefied of himself by his resurrection from the dead. How is it possible, after all this, to dispute the truth of what he hath revealed i mode rol tarchot

Many hundreds of his disciples too were witnesses of these things; and great numbers of them have sealed their testimony with their their blood. They have also left the history of what our Saviour faid and did in writing, for the use and benefit of all mankind. In these writings, whatsoever is necessary for every man to know, to believe and practife, is delivered in a manner so clear and plain, that the meanest person can't be ignorant of it, but it must be owing to his own wickedness, or culpable carelesness. Whosoever feriously inquires after his duty, he may either read it there, or procure the know-

ledge of it from those who can.

THE whole subject of examination into the duties of religion, according to the Apostle's admonition in the text, confifts in this, and this only. That we make it our business to know, upon good and fure grounds, what it is that we are to believe and do, in order to falvation. The declarations or decrees of others, concerning articles of faith, can be no sufficient warrant for the safety of any man, either in rejecting, or embracing them, unless they were to answer for them too at the great day of trial. But who dares rely upon the bare affurance which another gives him, when we are so plainly told, that every one of us shall give an account of himself Rom. xiv. to God?

In matters of practice the case is the very same; there every man ought to be thoroughly convinced of the lawfulness of the thing before he dares to act. Let Ver. 5. every man, says the same Apostle, be ful-

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ly persuaded in his own mind. He that Rom. xiv. doubtetb is damned - For what sever is not of faith is fin. He must therefore prove all things: And for this the Scripture is his only rule; and by this rule every man is to determine of his duty in particular, according to his own reason and un-

derstanding.

23.

IT cannot be denied, but there are many difficult and obscure passages in the holy Scripture, and even in the New Testament, especially in some of the epistles. This may possibly give occasion to some degree of terror and distraction in men of weak minds, and over-timorous dispositions, who may suspect or fear that something necessary to the knowledge or practice of their Christian duty may be contain'd in some of those difficult expressions of which they find they are not able, even with the best assistances which they can procure, to comprehend the meaning. But they who fail to gain the certain fense of such perplexing passages, after all their honest industry and pains, ought not to be uneasy in their thoughts about it; they may rest assured that God doth not require it of them; this ignorance will never be imputed as a crime. 'Tis a great absurdity and contradiction to suppose, that a wise, and good, and merciful God will demand impossibilities from any of his creatures.

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Lecius.

Those things which are absolutely necessary to be believed by every one are few, and plain, as delivered in the Gospel; and the rules of life, as there laid down, are easy and intelligible. Every one, under pain of damnation, is bound to believe and obey what he understands to be required of him by the word of God; and he may be comforted in this,

that he is obliged to nothing more.

For the better understanding of these things he may feek instruction from the learned; and particularly from the ministers of God's word; but there is no neceffity, or just cause, that he should give up his own reason in a profound submission to their dictates. They are no more infallible than he himself is. If he is liable to be mistaken, so are they. He is not bound to believe any notions and opinions which they may tell him of, any further than he fees them to be conformable to the plain word of God; concerning which he is to judge, according to the capacity which God hath given him, and the proper opportunities which providence hath afforded for the improvement of his talents; being conscious to himfelf, that he is not wilfully biaffed by any prejudices or prepoffessions in favour of fuch principles as may best accord with his inclinations or defigns, but that he diligently and honeftly feeks the truth in the fincerity of his heart.

Ecclus. xxxvii. 13, 14, 15.

I SHALL thut up this discourse with the advice of the fon of Sirach: Let the counsel of thine own heart stand; for there is no man more faithful unto thee than it. For a man's mind is sometimes wont to tell bim more than seven watchmen, that fit above in an high tower. And above all this pray to the most High, that be will direct thy way in trutb. heriolinos ed warrant has a boo

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DISCOURSE XII.

The Duty of examining into the Truth and Reasonableness of Religion.

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Prove all Things: Hold fast that which ver, out confiant boog is adily perfevere in

N opening the substance of this text, after I had remark'd upon the Apostle's ingenuous manner of addressing himself to those whom he had converted to the Christian faith, imposing nothing by his mere personal authority, but submitting all things to the determination of their judgments, I obferved that his exhortation to them contains these two points of doctrine,

First, THAT it is every man's duty to examine into the reasons and proofs of his

religion, And,

Second-

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Secondly, To adhere constantly to that faith which he hath, upon a fair inquiry, seen good and sufficient reason to embrace, and is not found to be erroneous, but rather stands confirmed by all future observations.

This fecond proposition is in it self so clear that it scarce admits of any further explanation; and the truth of it so apparent as not to stand in need of any formal proof. What feems to be most useful upon this head is, to fuggest some proper methods to all honest and fincere inquirers after truth, how they may defend themselves against the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive; that, like children, they may not be toffed to and fro with every wind of doctrine; that they may not only discover, but constantly and steadily persevere in the right and good way. And there is nothing which I conceive more effectual to this purpose, than to examine with diligence and impartiality whatfoever we are obliged to believe and practife, and to fix deeply in our memories that force of evidence which we found fufficient to convince us. The proof of what is right and good is the only means by which we can support our constancy, and which, under all temptations and contrivances to divert us from it, will best inable us to hold it fast. This is the chief corner stone, which being rightly placed, the whole building will stand the firmer for it; and if this be not folid and well laid, the superstructure which is rais'd upon it will be in great danger of tumbling to the

ground.

In exhorting us to prove all things, and by subjoining immediately upon it, Hold fast that which is good; in giving us this double precept in such an order, our learned Apostle hath proceeded most methodically. The latter branch is very regularly and wifely grafted upon the former. If any thing will preserve a man from wavering in the faith, it must be a firm persuasion, upon good grounds, of the truth and reasonableness of that which he professeth to believe. If he understands clearly both what it is, and why he makes profession of it; if he hath found on a strict inquiry, that it is conformable to his own rational apprehensions of the divine will, and which his conscience tells him is also most agreeable to the true sense and meaning of the holy Gospel too, a faith so grounded will not eafily be shaken, either by force or artifice.

THE shield of faith, well tempered with knowledge and understanding, will render a man almost invulnerable by the sword of persecution. The wise Apostle foresaw what sharp engagements of this kind the Thessalonian Christians were likely to be exposed to, and therefore he admonished them, that they should not be unprovided with this excellent armour. He takes notice, that they had already undergone some trials of this kind, as P 2 well

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Chap. ii. 14.

Chap. ii.

it must be a sum

truth of their religion.

IT is not absolutely impossible, I must own, but that a man may undergo great hardships and calamities, rather than give up an opinion which he hath long retained, though, perhaps, he can give no clear distinct account of the thing it self; and tho' he does not know for what reasons he at first embraced it; and though he hath not one fingle argument to offer in defence of it: This is nothing but mere stubbornness; itis not the effect of any virtue or religion in him, and can be effeemed no other than a manifest indication of a most perverse and obstinate disposition. Such a behaviour is not worthy to be dignified with the honourable titles of constancy and Christian fortitude. Such a man may move our pity, and a just commiseration of his folly and stupidity, but he is not worthy of our praise or imitation is used soften asset of the Sports ready undergone force that of this kind.

As this is no ways valuable where we fee it, fo I think it is not very often to be met with. But that couragious perseverance in the truth, which is founded upon the principles before discoursed of, will feldom fail us in the time of trial. This will prove a good defence against the craft. or violence of every adversary; and therefore I shall consider its influence upon our Christian constancy, in regard of atheists and unbelievers; of our popish adversaries; and of the feveral parties and divisions among Protestants themselves. In all which cases we shall see, that what hath been recommended under the first head may be very ferviceable to us, in keeping us from wavering in the faith.

[1.] We shall see how these principles will fortify us against the attacks of atheists and unbelievers. This advice to prove all things being duly followed, 'tis very easy to perceive will be a double guard against atheism

and infidelity.

1. As it engageth us to make a strict examination into the truth and certainty both of natural and revealed religion. And,

2. As that examination duly made will

be a means to secure us from apostaly.

1. I THINK it is morally impossible for any rational person to continue long in athe-istical insidelity, who seriously and heartily sets himself to examine strictly and diligently into the truth and certainty both of natural and revealed religion.

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Whoever undertakes this province, if he puts his mind into a ferious frame, and is heartily disposed to embrace the truth, as it shall appear upon inquiry, half his work is done. This very disposition will incline his Maker to manifest himself unto him; and at the same time it will cause him to disrelish the vain and empty conversation of atheistical and profane persons; it disarms them too of their chiefest weapons, for if you are not pleased with jests and witticisms they have little else to offer.

A&s xvii. 27, 28.

WHAT person of common understanding can be at a loss to find his Maker, if he will but take the pains with diligence and fincere intentions to inquire after him? He is not far from every one of us; for in bim we live, and move, and bave our being. It is not poffible that any one making fuch a fearch, with fuch a temper, should deny the truth of Christianity. Is there any kind of evidence wanting to confirm it, either from without, or from within? The external proofs are fuch, as no fact or history was ever so attested with. These I hinted at before, as particularly that most convincing evidence of Christ's divine commission which he gave us by his refurrection from the dead, which alfo was further strenthen'd and confirmed by his visible ascension into heaven; the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles; and the miraculous powers which, by his appointment, were from thence convey'd unto them.

and

THE internal proofs also, of which I said nothing in that place, to men of understanding, are as convincing as any other. The doctrines which he taught us, together with the motives with which he hath enforced them, are above the reach of human wifdom to contrive. They are every way worthy of that great and glorious God, from

whom we fay they are derived.

2. WHEN this examination hath been duly made, it will be a means to secure us from apostaly - The same force of evidence, which hath once been so persuasive, as to engage an unbeliever to renounce his infidelity, must needs be strong enough to keep him stedfast in the faith of Christ. If the reasons and arguments for Christianity were clear and convincing when they were first examined and confidered of, they will grow stronger and more powerful every day, as the believing Christian feels their influence upon his life and conversation. And,

This leads me to another observation, which affords an argument not less convincing than the former, and that is, that they who embrace the Christian faith, after a thorough examination, and upon a full conviction of its truth and credibility, are the most likely persons in the world to lead their lives agreeably to their profession: By so doing they will gain a victory over their lusts and finful paffions; or at least they will in time perceive them to be much weaken'd

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and impaired, even as their fouls prosper. Now this is it which in all probability will fecure them from backsliding. Experience shews us, that nothing tempts men to throw off all regard to conscience and religion like their vicious inclinations, as nothing is a greater bar to their conversion at the first.

[2,] The principles of religion being thus examined, and perfectly understood, we shall hereby be able the more successfully to maintain the conslict with our grand adversaries of the church of Rome. The kingdom of antichrist, which they uphold, is founded upon ignorance and worldly policy, and can be supported by nothing else. The popish superstitions crept into the church in the darkest ages; and the grossest of them all, when learning was at the lowest ebb.

As men began by degrees to break out from that thick cloud, the light of the Gofpel began accordingly to shine upon them; and as these clouds were more and more dispell'd, so the truth did more and more appear, till at length, at the happy Reformation, it brighten'd up into an open Day.

Is reason and the Bible be the only rules by which we are to square both our faith and manners; if God hath given us these two great lights to guide us in our choice; what can we think of those men who would deprive us of them both?

If the Apo-

Apostle, under the direction of God's infallible Spirit, hath exhorted all Christians to prove all things necessarily belonging to that religion by which they must be saved, how then can they give credit to those persons, who tell them positively, that they have not any right to judge at all; but that they are bound absolutely to submit, in all things concerning their falvation, to that infallible guide, which indeed is no where to be found; and where to place it is a thing not hitherto universally agreed upon, even amongst the Romanists themselves? — If I believe the Scripture to be the word of God, and find that I am there commanded, or exhorted to examine strictly into the grounds of my religion, is not this a fufficient reason for me to reject the communion of that church which will not fuffer me to inquire into the reasons of my faith? If they refuse me the liberty of judging for my felf, and the holy Gospel expresly directs me to the contrary, the case is plain which way I am to take. In a word, is it possible to have any tolerable good opinion of that church, which strives to rob us of the most facred rights and privileges which belong to us, either as we are men, or as we are Christians, reason, and the Scriptures?

'Tis no great fign of honesty and good intention, when they, who require us to submit to their instructions, will yet refuse to be our guides, upon any other condi-

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tion, but that we tamely suffer them to lead us hood-wink'd we know not whi-

SAINT Paul, we find, did not expect such a flavish, blind obedience from the faithful under his most peculiar care, as appears evidently, not only from the text, and what has hitherto been faid upon it, but he plainly confirms the same truth in other pasfages. He appealed also to the judgment and reason of the Corinthians, that he made it his business to make all things plain and intelligible to their understandings: To which purpose he declared, that he did use great plainness of speech; and not as Moses, put a vail over their faces: That he and his brethren did not walk in craftiness, nor bandle the word of God deceitfully; but that Chap. iv. they did, by manifestation of the truth, commend themselves to every man's conscience in the fight of God. But how could the truth be made manifest to them all, unless it were revealed and taught in very plain intelligible terms? And how could it affect the consciences of all men, except it was permitted to be confidered, and examined by them all; and that upon hearing, and confidering the proofs, they might all have been convinc'd of the evidence upon which

> IF any part of this Apostle's writings was more difficult to be understood, yet this is certainly the undoubted meaning of those expressions, That whatsoever concerned the

it stood?

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con-

consciences of all men was plain and easy to be understood by all; and that by their own consciences they were to judge of it.

But.

It is farther observable, that the Romanists do not only contradict the doctrine of saint Paul in this matter, but even that of their own Apostle too; who by advising us, that we should be ready always to give! Pet. iii. an answer to every man that asketb a rea-15. Son of the hope that is in us, hath given so good an argument against their vain pretences to implicit faith, as one would think should be sufficient to stop their mouths upon that subject.

I SHALL add but one confideration more, to shew how efficacious this precept is to preserve the constancy of every Christian against the assaults of Popish emis-

faries.

The infallibility of the Roman church, and the absolute necessity of some unerring guide to determine things doubtful in religion, is by themselves confessed to be the fundamental article in dispute between us. If therefore you are once convinc'd that it is every Christian's duty to discuss and strictly weigh the reasons of his faith, by consulting the sacred writings, and determining his choice by his own private judgment; if you hold inviolably to these principles, the whole dispute is at an end, and they have nothing more to say.

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[3.] LET us confider what influence these principles will have upon our constancy, in regard of the several parties and divisions among Protestants themselves. As to these differences in general, I have shewn, that those things which are absolutely necessary to every one's falvation, are few and plain; that they are all contain'd in the holy Scripture; and, that every man is obliged to confider of them; and, to examine what those things are in which his conscience is concerned; and, that by taking proper meafures he is sufficiently qualified to pass a judgment for himself. As for the disputes which reign among us, these, as I have obferved, are, generally fpeaking, about fuch matters only as do not constitute the essence of religion. And,

THAT which I conclude from these remarks is this, That a plain man hath nothing more to do, than to understand the grounds and reasons of that faith which he professeth; not concerning himself with those intricacies and subtleties in points of difference, which do not lie within the compass of his understanding, and which can serve to little else but to distract the minds, and disturb the quiet of the

vulgar.

LET those few necessary things, which are plain and easy in themselves, be well established in his heart and memory, by such proofs and arguments as are best suited to his judgment, and let him leave the rest

rest to be canvassed by men of learning and a more liberal education. Let him fearch, as near as possible, to the bottom of all necessary, and useful, and practical doctrines; let him make good proof of these, according to the measure of those talents he is indued withal, and refolve not to vex or torment himself about that which he is not able to apprehend with any certainty or clearness. Let him take this method, and then he need not wander far to feek the truth. He may continue fafely in that communion where nothing is imposed upon his conscience but what is evidently necessary for all men to believe and practife, who take the Scripture for their only rule. and bodism suff si or binaft

WHATEVER notions or opinions may happen to be held by any private members of the church a person joins with; whatever heats and animosities may be carried on, concerning matters merely speculative, between some of those with whom he is united in the same communion, these need not to disturb him in the least, his duty doth not necessarily demand more of him, than to satisfy his conscience in those things to which his consent and approbation is particularly required.

Thus when an honest well-meaning church-of-England-man hath inquired so far into the principles of his faith and wor-ship, as to be well fatisfied in his own mind, that he may continue in a constant commu-

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nion with that church; and that such conformity lays him under no necessity of offending against any one plain precept of the Gospel, but rather contributes, as he may rationally judge, to further the great defign of it, in promoting peace and charity: Such a one hath no reason to regard, or be concerned about such disputed matters as are above his comprehension, and of which he is not called upon to give a particular account - Let him but prove all things relating to church membership, by the same rule by which he proves himself a member of the church of Christ in general, viz. by diftinguishing that which is effential from those things which are but merely circumstantial to it: This method being taken, it lops off all unnecessary branches of dispute. This reduces the subject of his inquiries to a very few things; and those also such as fall within the compass of his own reason, and consequently will be a means to set him free from all that diffidence and uncertainty which is apt to confound the understandings, and diffract the minds of plain unlearned perfons - This will cause him to hold fast the faith without wavering; it will teach him not to forego that which he knows to be true and certain, because there possibly may be some circumstantial matters, the necessity, or expediency of which may to him feem very doubtful; or which, perhaps, he may judge to be neither necessary, nor expedient.

A Man who takes up his religion at all adventures, and knows no other reason for it; but the custom of his country, his being trained up to it from his infancy, and the affurance of his teacher for the truth of what he tells him, may be eafily staggered in his principles; he may foon be made fenfible, that custom is wrong in feveral cases; uncertain in very many; and not fafely to be relied upon in any one; and, that the teachers of all communions do often clash with one another in their private fentiments; and therefore, if he hath much regard to these things, it will be a cause of great uncertainty and distraction to him. But if a man hath once carefully examined into things, and fettled his judgment upon good proofs of what is absolutely necessary for him to profess and practise, and is resolved to trouble himself with nothing further; when he is thus prepared, he will never want a certain steady rule for his direction. Having first proved all things abfolutely necessary to be known, and approved by him for the guidance of his faith and manners, there will be no great danger after this, but that he will, as becomes every faithful Christian, persevere in that of which he hath so clear a light, and fuch good affurances; and continue still to hold fast that religion, which he, upon folid grounds, perceives to be good and profitable to his great interest; and by which he may have great fatisfaction in his

his own conscience, and strongly hope that he shall please his God while he remains on earth, and be for ever happy in his presence, when he appears before him, to receive the full reward of his sincere obedience to his will.

principles; he may soon be toade ferfible, that colom is wrong in leveral cales; ancertain in very many; and not (alely to be relied upon in any ope; and, that therem had ers of all communications do often clash with one another in their private featiments to and therefore, if he bath much regard to their things, it will be a cause of great ancertainty and diffe e di mil omi baginl Ored he will new nodw. Pipul ver want a certain was tule for his direchom Having first proved all things abtolucely necessary to be known, and anproved by him for the guidance of his faith and manners, there will be no grenc canger after this, but that he will, as becomes every faithful Christian, perlevere in that of which he hath to clear a light, and facts' good afformaces, and consider aid to hold falt that felle on, which he, Look 3d all sovience perceives to be good yd ban i ffereigi rearg an or elderforg ber which he enev have great failefultion le girl.



DISCOURSE XIII.

The common Christian's Right of judging for himself in Matters of Religion.

LUKE xii. 57.

Tea, and why even of your selves judge ye not what is right?



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HEN Christ had finished some discourse which he had with his Disciples, he took occasion to reproach the unbelieving Jews, who stood there

present, with their wilful ignorance, and affected blindness, in not perceiving who he was. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of Ver. 56, the sky, and of the earth: But how is it that ye do not discern this time? Ye can, says he, discern the signs and prognostications of the weather; and if ye were as honest, and diligent in searching after things of much greater

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moment to be known, ye would as readily discover the time, and person of the Messiah; ye would see that it is the very season which the antient Prophets have plainly mark'd out for his appearance among men. Ye have sufficient understanding and discretion in your worldly affairs, why do ye not therefore exercise the same degree of reason and discretion in those matters which concern your spiritual estate? Yea, and why even of your selves judge ye not what is right?

THE thing here spoken of is religious truth, or the truth of the Christian religion, which depends upon the knowing of Christ to be the true Messiah. To this knowledge, our Saviour here intimates, the unbelieving Jews might easily have attained, by the right use of those faculties and opportunities which God had given them. They might have discovered him to be the Christ, and that would have engaged them to receive instruction from him, and give attention to his doctrine.

I SHALL reduce the feveral particulars, which I intend to infift upon from the words before us, to the following propofitions.

First, THAT every one is oblig'd to come to some determination in matters of religion.

Secondly, THAT this is to be done by his

own private judgment.

Third-

Thirdly, THAT this liberty of judging what is right is granted equally to all men: It is the duty and privilege of all rational persons.

Fourthly, FROM this discretionary judgment of all reasonable creatures, even the weightiest and most important points

are not excepted.

Fiftbly, I SHALL answer such objections as may be made against this do-Ctrine.

First, Every one is oblig'd to come to fome determination in the matter of religion. Christ's exposulation with the Yews doth plainly intimate these two things,

I. THAT all men, after a serious and mature confideration of the thing, ought to re-

folve upon having fome religion.

2. THAT it is not a matter of indifference

what religion they profess.

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I. THEY who believe that there is a God who made the world, and governs it by his providence, must believe also, that God is to be worshipped after some fort or other, by all creatures whose understanding qualifies them for it. There are but few, if any, who will dispute this thing; and yet, I fear, the number of those is too considerable, who have thought but very little of this affair; and of those who have entertained some thoughts about it, there are many who have never so considered of their duty, as to apprehend the absolute and indispensable ne-

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ceffity of it, so as to make them seriously and stedfastly to resolve upon it. As far as one can judge by mens behaviour, there are too many under a careless indifferency in this very weighty matter. Some persons are so very indolent, that they can't endure to enter upon any thought, which they suppose will be perplexing to them, or give the least disturbance to their minds. Others are fo taken up with the pleasures and enjoyments, or fo bufy in purfuing the profits and emoluments of this present life; or in carking for the necessaries and conveniencies which belong unto the body only; or in providing a temporal subfishence for themselves and families, that there is no room for God in all their thoughts; and the care of their immortal fouls feldom or never is taken into confideration.

This inconsiderate behaviour is both scandalous, and dangerous in the last degree; for what can be a more scandalous reproach to a man's reason or understanding, or what more desperate neglect can he be guilty of, than by indulging of a lazy temper, to suffer himself to fall down headlong into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched? Again, is it not the utmost madness to pursue those short-lived pleasures, which must end in everlasting torments? And, what can be a greater sign of folly and stupidity, than to labour for the meat that perisheth, and utterly to neglect that which endureth to everlasting life?

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THE generality of those careless persons, whom I now chiefly labour to convince of their mistakes, are such as seem to worship God, and who do make a shew of some religion, by appearing not unfrequently in places which are fet apart for prayers and thankigivings to Almighty God, and other offices of religion; but all this will be reckoned as just nothing in God's account, while it is a matter of mere form only; and fuch it is undoubtedly, when men do it purely out of custom, without a previous consideration of their obligations to their Maker and Preferver, and a holy intention founded upon that, to recognize the sovereignty of God, and their dependance upon him for all the good which they possess, or hope for, either in this, or in a better world.

Whatever outward actions we perform, without any determinate resolution of serving God, they are not properly religious actions; that which is necessary to give them that denomination is, that we design by the performance of them to conform our selves to the divine will, however manifested or declared unto us: Until we have, at least, formed some general resolution to this purpose, we cannot truly say that we have any manner of religion.

2. As the text implies, that men ought to resolve upon having some religion, so also it is there supposed, that it is not a thing indifferent what religion they profess. If this had been a matter of indifferency, Christ

would

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would not have expostulated after such a manner with the Jews, for not judging what was right, or what was otherwife. It would found but very oddly, to have asked them, why they did not judge or confider and determine what was right, if all religious worship, and all the principles on which 'tis grounded, had been equally approved of by Almighty God? If fo, they could not have been justly blamed, whether they would choose to follow Christ or Moses; or, whether they would have rejected both the one and the other of them, and worshipped God according to the rules of Aristotle or Plato, Socrates or Pythagoras, or any other fect of the philosophers, who believed a God, and owned his providence in the government of the world? But,

When we have determined with our selves that we will serve the Lord our God, and are convinced that we ought to worship him according to the rules and precepts of the bleffed Gospel (that being, as we believe, the last, the clearest, and most perfect revelation of God's will to men;) yet seeing there are so many divisions, and sub-divisions among Christians, we may still be at a loss to know with whom we are to join our selves in the public exercise of Christ's religion.

A Man cannot join indifferently with all, or any of them, because they will not all admit of it, unless he openly renounces all communion with the other parties. And it cannot seem indifferent which he chooses,

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when he fees them feparating from, and excluding one another from their public offices; and especially when he considers, that they do mutually condemn and charge each other with the foulest errors, both in faith and practice; and moreover, when some of them do require him to pronounce damnation upon all those who differ from them in the methods of religion. He must therefore come to some determination, not only as to ferving God in general, but more particularly, he must take up a serious resolution of ferving him in fuch a manner, and by fuch a way of worship as he thinks to be the best, and as he judges will be most acceptable to God. I am now to prove,

ry one's own private judgment —— All religion may be confidered as it hath relation either to faith or practice. Under both these confiderations it will be found to depend upon our own understandings, and the judgment which we pass upon the strength of those reasons and arguments by which we are persuaded either to believe, or do what appears to be our duty.

I. FAITH or belief is that affent which is given to any proposition or thing related to us, upon the testimony of another. Divine faith (which is the subject we are now upon) is our affent to some truth as revealed from God. He who demands this from any one must prove his mission to him, i.e. must

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make it evidently appear, that he hath received immediate authority from God to deliver such a revelation of God's will. If he goes about to convince him of the truth of the doctrine, or proposition laid before him, by arguments of reason only, without pretending to any fuch commission or authority, then, though he succeeds in his attempt, that affent which is given to the proofs he hath produced cannot properly be called faith, as not proceeding from divine testimony, but the evidence of reason. But however that be, whether the thing proposed be a matter of divine revelation, or fome conclusion to be inferr'd from principles of reason only, whatever is pretended, afferted, or proved for his conviction, the man is still determined by his private judgment: He must employ his reasoning faculty before he can be any ways affured that God hath so declared his mind; so that reason is subservient, and absolutely necessary to a discreet and wife determination, and the judgment to be passed either upon human or divine credentials; which makes it strange that ever it should enter into any learned mens heads, to decry the free exercise of human reason when they magnify the virtue and excellency of divine faith.

From what I have said concerning faith, and the proofs requisite to confirm the authority of any person who shall require it from us, it appears further, that whatever any one assents to, merely upon the authoricy of any persons upon earth, whether magistrates, or ministers, or church, or council, can never properly be stiled an act of Christian faith: neither can it be his duty to make profession of it, by virtue of any such commands.

RELIGION ought to be the object of every man's free choice; and this is so true, that whatever is not so is not religion. If custom and education be the cause why any of those tenets or principles, usually called articles of faith, are embraced and vindicated; or that any particular way of worthip is taken up, or continued in, this is so far from being true religion, that it is not possible to reconcile it even to the use of common sense --- If fear of human power be the prevailing argument with any one, he may not improperly be said to worship men - If interest and temporal advantage be the chief, or only motive, then he worships mammon, and not God.

The doctrine contrary to this right of every man to the exercise of his own private judgment in matters of religion, is implicit faith, or taking up the principles of religion upon trust, which is a popish doctrine, and is attended with very dangerous consequences, of which we have the most notorious instances in those countries where the unhappy people are forced to submit to the tyrannical usurpations of the priests over their consciences; by virtue of which submission they have the grossest absurdaties and contradictions im-

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posed upon them; are taught to commit the most execrable murders and massacres without reluctance; to rejoice in the cries and torments of the wretched; and to triumph in the destruction of the most innocent and righteous persons. What ill consequences may they not justly fear, who resign the concerns of their souls to the conduct of those of whose knowledge, or integrity, they can have no assurance; and who, either through ignorance, or design, may lead them into errors, which, for ought they know, may endanger their salvation?

Upon these considerations some, even of those persons who contend earnestly for the imposition of established doctrines, do yet, and that very often, in contradiction to themselves, express their dislike of implicit faith; call it a popish doctrine, and charge it as a thing to be reproved in the Romanists; and blame those weak and unwary protestants, who, by imitating them with respect to some difficult points of faith, afford the general

principle too much countenance *.

A FAMOUS defender of impositions, when pressed by his adversary upon that head, confesses, that, It is as impossible to believe any thing without our understanding, as to see without our eyes +.

simme on Flods airespicate.

^{*} Defence of some Considerations concerning the Trinity, page 7.

⁺ The Case stated, p. 46.

THIS is well and truly faid; and the adversaries never can dispute it with those confistent Protestants who maintain it always in its full and just extent; but such affertions come but aukwardly from the tongues or pens of those who condemn with rigor the errors of the understanding; affirming confidently, that persons who have sought the truth with all imaginable diligence and fincerity of heart, and their judgments remaining still erroneous, may, on that account alone, be worthy of damnation; and that they may be justly prosecuted and punished by their superiors in their bodies, in their liberties, or estates; by fines, or confiscations, banishments, or imprisonments, for practices, or opinions no ways inconfistent with the fafety of the state or commonwealth. These, methinks, are very incoherent principles, and I fee not how they can possibly be reconciled to one another.

To talk of allowing men the free liberty of inquiring, and not permitting them with impunity to enjoy the fruits of their inquiries, in declaring openly their thoughts, and modestly contending for those important truths which they think they have discovered, and which their conscience tells them are most useful, and even necessary to be known by others, as well as by themselves; to say they have a right to judge, but that they have no right to speak or act according to their judgment, this is mere mockery.

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'Tis more ridiculous, absurd, and contradictory, than even popery it self, and is equally pernicious and destructive of that true Christian liberty which Protestants contend for.

IF articles of religion, settled and established by authority of those whose judgments are on all hands acknowledged not to be unerring, are yet fo facred and inviolable, as that they may not be contradicted or disputed by such as judge them to be false upon inquiry, to what purpose are men called upon, and often earnestly exhorted to examine into the truth and reasons of their faith? Is it only that they may be the better able to defend what hath once been taught them, whether true or false? If this be all the liberty which can be granted to a Protestant inquirer, the Romanists have certainly, in this respect, the better of him; his ease and fafety would be more secure if this was wholly taken from him.

Ir mens industry in searching for, and their honesty in openly declaring and bearing testimony to what appears to them as most important truth, are vices punishable by the laws of God and man, who then can rationally deny the virtue and reasonableness, any more than the present happiness and safety of indolence, ignorance, and hy-

pocrify?

WHATEVER appears to any man, upon a strict examination, to be just and right, he must unavoidably assent to it; for he can no

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more judge by the faculties of other men than he can fee with their eyes, or hear with their ears; so that here is both a right, and also a necessity, that they must determine for themselves concerning truth, when they are

allowed the liberty to examine.

Ir men are not to judge of that which is proposed by their superiors as an article of faith, but are obliged to receive for truth whatfoever is fo declared to them, the confequence will be this, that many persons are obliged to believe the most notorious falsehoods to be certain truths; and that the fame proposition, at the same time, in different countries, may lawfully be declared, and ought to be received and owned both as true and false; since it is evident, that what in one nation is adjudged to be a great and necessary truth, in another is universally condemned as absolutely false; nay, as an impious and dangerous position.

2. MEN have at least an equal right of judging for themselves in all things wherein their practical duty is more immediately con-

cerned.

WHEN Christ comes to judge the world, every one of us shall give account of himself Rom. xiv. to God. Now, I ask, by what rule is he accountable? Is it by the Scripture? If so, then he is oblig'd to direct his actions by that rule. But if it shall be said, that others are to measure out his duty for him, then the Scripture is not properly a rule to him; it is fuch to those only who take upon them

238 The common Christian's Right of judging to be authoritative interpreters of that rule and guides to him; and they in truth are his rule.

THAT which, in my apprehension, puts this whole matter beyond all dispute, and possible contradiction, is this, That the thing which renders all our services acceptable to God, and profitable to our salvation, is, the integrity and sincerity of our hearts; and as to this, it is impossible that any others should be qualified to judge of it with any certainty. Every single person can assure himself, that this is known persectly to no man living, but himself alone, For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?

1 Cor.

OTHER men can guess only by appearances; by drawing inferences from such things as they can discern in our outward behaviour: But though in this way they may have very strong probabilities, yet they may very possibly be mistaken, and it is not to be doubted but they very often are so. They may fee a man very frequent in his addresses to God in public; very constant in attending upon God's holy word and facraments; very grave in his deportment, when he comes into the Christian congregation; and all his outward carriage in other places also may be correspondent hereunto, and yet after all, for ought they know, this man may be a fecret hypocrite. He may do all this on the prospect of some worldly ends which he hopes to serve thereby. The love of God, notwithstanding

withstanding all this outward shew of piety, may be far enough removed out of his heart. And yet on this one thing our Lord hath plainly founded all the offices of piety, as far as God regards them. Thou shall love the Matt.xxii. Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all 37. thy foul, and with all thy mind.

THE same thing is also true concerning all the duties of the second table. The second, as our Saviour tells us in the same place, is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy Ver. 39. neighbour as thy felf. But who, besides the man himself, can say, That his love towards his neighbour is without dissimu-

lation?

THE Apostle plainly intimates, that a man may bestow all his goods to feed the poor; 1 Cor. xiii. and even give his body to be burned; and yet, 3. under all this fair appearance, he may want that real love and charity which God requires. It is possible that all this may be done out of a principle of vain-glory, and to get himself the reputation of extraordinary virtue. And.

AFTER all, if we allow that others are to determine concerning the virtue of a man's faith and practice, upon fuch a supposition I fee not how he can be bound to give any account hereafter of his behaviour, any further than what relates to that one fingle point of yielding up his conscience to the direction of another. It feems more rational, that in all things else, they should be obliged to give account to God for him hereafter, who

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did here dictate and prescribe to him, and made themselves the masters of his conscience. But if any one of them should have the vain assurance to undertake this thing, be must certainly be very low in understanding

who would venture to rely upon it.

The laws of God are those only by which all mankind shall finally be tried, and stand for ever either acquitted, or condemned. But the laws of men are sometimes stat contradictions to the laws of God. Let us take great heed therefore, lest in paying too great regard to any human injunctions, we should unwarily contravene the precepts and statutes of the Lord our God. And this we never can be certain of, unless we consider with our selves, and carefully examine how far they are consistent, so as that we may assure our selves, that our obedience to the human can be no transgression of divine commands.

MEN may, indeed, presume to dispense with God's commandments, but this will be no sufficient security to those who, relying upon such a dispensation, shall knowingly and wilfully refuse obedience to them. Thus the Romanists have acted, by discharging the laity from the observation of Christ's express command, to all, without distinction, to take the elements both of bread and wine in memory of his death, saying particularly of the cup in the plainest terms, Drink ye all

xxvi. 27. of this.

THE same thing hath long been, and is still done by them, in matters of a higher nature, in their granting of indulgences, by which the poor people are deluded, and encouraged to supersede the duties both of natural, and revealed religion. In this they go beyond the practice of the wicked Pharifees, of whom our Lord complained, that they had made the commandment of God of Matt. xvi none effect by their tradition. The Apostles, o. on the contrary, have given us a plain rule for our behaviour. When they stood before the council of the Jews, and were told by the High-priest, that they had been commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus, thus they pleaded, and so must we determine for our selves, that we ought to obey God rather Acts v. than men.

As men may forbid what God commands, fo also they may require what God forbids, E. G. to worthip a piece of bread; to fall down before a graven image, and worship creatures. But this will by no means make it lawful to be done, or justify us in transgressing the divine commands; so that in all these cases it is absolutely necessary that we should determine of our duty by our own private judgment — And methinks nothing can be more evident than this plain truth, That every one, in matters of religion, or in what concerns his own duty, either as to faith or practice, must be determined by his own judgment, since this

The common Christian's Right, &c.

Rom. xiv. is not to be denied, That every one of us

shall give account of bimself to God.

In fo doing we need not fear what cenfure men shall dare presumptuously to pass upon us. Let us take care to have always the approbation of our own consciences, and hereby we shall know, that we are of the truth, and shall assure our bearts before God: For if our beart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.

on the confrary, have given as a plate rule for our behaviour. When they flood before the council of the Year, and were told by the High priefly that they had been commanded not to reach in the name of Jefus Jehus they oleaded, and to much we determine for



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plain cruth, That every once in manners of selicion, or in what concernables own-duther as to faith or practice, must be

wined by his own judgment, finde this



DISCOURSE XIV.

The common Christian's Right of judging for himself in Matters of Religion.

LUKE xii. 57.

Tea, and why even of your selves judge ye not what is right?

HE heads under which I proposed to handle this text were these,

First, THAT every one is obliged to come to some determination in the matter of religion.

Secondly, THAT this is to be done by his

own private judgment.

Thirdly, THAT this liberty of judging what is right is granted equally to all men. It is the duty and privilege of all rational persons.

Fourthly, From this discretionary judgment of all reasonable creatures, even the R 2 weightiest 244 The common Christian's Right of judging weightiest and most important points are not excepted.

Fifthly, I PROMISED to answer such objections as may be made against this doctrine.

I HAVE dispatch'd the two first, and therein shewn, What is the duty and privilege of Christians in general. I shall now shew,

Thirdly, THAT this liberty of judging what is right is granted equally to all men. It is the duty and privilege of all rational

persons without exception.

SAINT Paul tells us in express words, That I Tim. ii. God will have all men to be faved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. From hence it appears, that all necessary truth is to be attained by every one whom God intends falvation for; that is to fay, for all men; for as he wills that all men should be faved, so he wills that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth.

This also is agreeable to what had been Jer. xxxi. before prophesied concerning the Christian 31, &. religion, that it should be made level to all capacities, and fuited to the condition and circumstances of all persons, as well the lowest, as the highest, so that all should

Heb. viii, know the Lord from the least to the 31.

greateft.

This religion needs nothing else to recommend it to the understanding and approbation of all rational, fincere and conscientious persons, but its own native simplicity

and purity; and where-ever it is preached and taught, without any human additions, alterations, or corruptions what soever, we may affirm, as saint Paul hath done upon the same account, that, If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to 2 Cor. them that are lost: Whose minds the God of iv. 3, 4-this world hath blinded, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

All believers, without distinction, are advised by saint Paul, not to conform themselves to the customs and manners of the world, but to prove what is that good, and Rom. xii. acceptable, and perfect will of God. And how must this be proved by them, but by the exercise of their understandings and judgments, in searching and examining what hath been revealed in the word of God con-

cerning it?

To this purpose the same Apostle doth frequently address himself to all Christians, without exception: Be ye not unwise, but Ephes. understand what the will of the Lord is _____ v. 17. I speak as to wise men: Judge ye what I say x. 15.

Judge in your selves: Is it comely that Chap. xi. a woman pray unto God uncovered? Let no 13. man judge you in meat or in drink, &c. And Col.ii.16, when he had exhorted the Thessalonians to prove all things, he gives a plain intimation in the same place, that he would not have this advice applied only to their rulers, or fuch as were most learned amongst them; for he adds there, I charge you by the Lord, 1 Thef. that this epistle be read unto all the boly bre-v. 27. R 3 tbren.

the doctrines therein published, and to be

laid before them.

If the Scriptures are not a rule equally given to all Christians, who are therefore required to regulate their lives according to it, then they, to whom they are allowed as such, must have a special title to this privilege, either upon the score of their learning, or by reason of some superior station in which they are placed among their brethren; but I shall shew, that no persons have authority above others, on either of these accounts, to the use, or interpretation of that common rule of faith and manners.

1. Men of learning stand upon the same foot with other Christians as to this matter. They may judge of their own duty, but they have no authority to impose their sentiments upon those who are not so qualified. Our Lord hath told us, that the ground rightly prepared to receive the heavenly seed, viz. the doctrine of the blessed Gospel, is not a wise and learned head, but an bonest and good beart.

Lukê viii. 15.

Ir none but the learned are capable of passing a judgment for themselves what things are necessary to their own salvation, I would fain know what degree of learning that is which puts a man into a capacity of judging for himself? And, what that fort of learning is in which a Christian must excel? A thousand other difficulties must be answered before a man can know, whether he is one

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of those who may fafely stand to the determination of his own judgment, after the use of all those methods he thinks requisite for his better information.

IT is not certain that he, who hath a greater share of learning than another, is rightly qualified by that attainment to be his guide in matters of religion: His judgment may bear no proportion to his education; in that, perhaps, he may be some degrees inferior to his unlearned brother; he alfo may be under greater prejudices as to those particular matters in which the other chiefly wants affistance. And if he hath a clearer light into the truth, better arguments and proofs for the support of it, he may, for aught the other knows, be greatly bialfed by fome worldly confiderations to conceal it from him. and appears of bloom sinds or ass

Every man may be much more certain of his own good intentions in his inquiries after truth, than he can possibly be of any other person's knowledge, or integrity. 'Tis not so sure to me, that another person, how highly soever I may think of his abilities, is right in what he judges, as it is, that I my felf am honest and fincere in my endeavours to attain the knowledge of my duty. I may know my own fidelity more certainly than I can difcern either his capacity or integrity, it is therefore much fafer to keep the guidance of my conscience in my own the white survey befored on Christic bashad the Pharifices, they did not confess

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- ALL men claim this privilege to themfelves, though there are some who are unwilling to grant it freely unto others; but that Gospel precept is founded upon natural justice, which saith, Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them. This rule doth evidently require, that we allow to every one the liberty of judging and acting according to the dictates of his conscience.

Matt. vii, 12.

> IT cannot fairly be denied, that there are many persons (whose learning, sense, and piety, is not inferior to what is found either in their civil, or ecclefiaftical superiors) who neither have, nor defire to be advanced to any post of profit, or authority, either in church or state; and who may therefore make known their fentiments with less danger to their worldly circumstances; and confequently they may be qualified to pass a truer judgment than others who are not fo intirely free from all temptations to conceal or difguife their real thoughts, and who may possibly be led aside by hopes and fears relating to their temporal interest. No one can be ignorant of this, that worldly interest and secular advantages are very apt to warp the judgment of many otherwise not undifcerning persons, as they are to put them fometimes upon drawing false and specious colours upon their principles John xii. and opinions. Many, we are told, among the chief rulers believed on Christ, but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess

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bim, lest they should be put out of the sydomes an accordance of a

nagogue.

As Christ declared, that he was fent to preach the Gospel to the poor, i. e. to men of mean capacities, of fmall learning, and low stations in the world; so he delivered the sublimest doctrines in the plainnest manner, in words adapted to men of moderate under-

standings.

His Apostles likewise, whatever talents they were indued withal, whether natural. or miraculous, did always use great plainness of speech in setting forth the doctrines necesfary to falvation. Saint Paul particularly. who we know was a man of a liberal education, professed that Christ sent him to preach : Cor. the Gospel, not with wisdom of words ____i. 17, &c. For it is written, faith he, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. From hence it appears. That the unlearned are sufficiently qualified, and have an equal right with the most learned persons, to judge for themfelves in those things which concern their falvation; and that the learned have no authority to impose upon other men their particular judgments or opinions.

2. If any persons have authority above others, to judge in these matters, by reason of their station, it must be either as civil magistrates, or ministers of the Gospel. But the holy Scripture is not more a rule to these, than it is to others, in the common multi-

tude of Christians.

(1.) Not the civil magistrate: His office is to maintain, as much as possible, all the rights and privileges of the society over which he is the head; to protect their lives, liberties, and possessions; to secure, as much as in him lies, their peace and welfare in this world; and to do nothing which may prejudice their felicity in the next; to reward or punish them, according to their obedience, or disobedience to the laws and constitutions

made for these good purposes.

HUMAN laws can establish justly nothing contrary to the eternal laws of God and nature. The law of nature gives to every man a right to conduct himself in the affairs of religion by his own reason, which proceeds in making its inquiries concerning the truth or probability of any proposition, by comparing it with some first principles, which he apprehends to be felf-evident: And as thefe need no proof themselves, so they are the standard by which to judge of all things else; fo that whatever is necessarily deduced from fuch principles must infallibly be true; and what is contrary to them must be absolutely false. According to the report thus made to his understanding, by the right use and application of his natural faculties, every man must inevitably judge; and no power either human or divine, can compel him to think otherwise while he is possessed of these faculties. For, a summer som an outling of

THE laws of God cannot possibly contradict the law of nature, which also is the law of God. There is not any intimation in his revealed will, that ever he defigned to vacate the law of nature in this particular. Christ hath declared the contrary to this; and the Gospel hath not any precept by which mens natural rights in this case are set aside or limited, but very many to vindicate and confirm them. Call no man your father upon earth: Matt. For one is your Father, who is in beaven. xxiii. 9. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the 1 Cor. servants of men. Stand fast therefore in the Gal. v. liberty wherewith Christ bath made us free.

Men can never be supposed, by entering originally into civil society, to renounce, from that time forwards, the free use of their natural faculties in the matter of conscience and religion; since that social combination was contrived, and voluntarily agreed upon, for their mutual security, and to protect every single member of it in all his just rights and liberties; of which this of judging and acting according to his understanding and conscience is the most valuable, and most unalienable.

(2.) The clergy have no more authority in this matter than other Christians have. God hath not declared it to be a right or privilege annexed to their office, to judge authoritatively what ought to be believed or practifed by the lairy; much less could such a notion be deduced from the common sense and reason of mankind. The clergy are neither more infallible, nor more impeccable than other men.

THEY

They who are fet apart for the study of divine things; who have had a fuitable education, and are endowed with talents proper for their calling, may be very useful in affifting others in the searches they shall make, and ought to be consulted in all doubtful cases: It is their duty to inform those who need instruction from them; and especially if they apply to them for their affistance or advice; but this can give them no authority to require a peremptory affent to their positive affirmations; they are obliged to make sufficient proof of what they do affert, by reason, and the word of God; and the persons who consult them are still at their full liberty to pass a judgment in their own minds concerning the strength and clearness of their arguments.

39, 60. Chap. xii. 54.

THE text is an appeal from the judgment. Chap. xi. of the Scribes and Pharisees, whom Christ had feverely reproved in the preceding chapter, for their obstinacy and hypocrify, to that of the common multitude; fo that he doth in effect declare, That the people had not only an equal right with the doctors and expounders of the law; but moreover, that they were equally, if not more capable, than the Scribes and lawyers, of judging what was right; and that they ought to do it. And.

> In the case of Christ being be who had been promised in the law and the prophets, we find, that the common multitude not only might, but that great numbers of them actually

did judge very right, by a proper application of the times and seasons; and did by the several prophesies concerning the Message fiab, discern the truth and certainty of his mission. As they trusted in the veracity of Moses, and believed him, so they believed Christ; perceiving plainly, that be was indeed the true Message plainly, that be was indeed the true Message; for when they beheld the miracle of the loaves, they said, This is John vior a truth that prophet that should come into the world. Thus also Philip, having been convinced himself, by what he had seen and heard, told his honest friend Nathanael, We Chapbave found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph.

At the time of Christ's appearance in the slesh, men of low degree, and uninstructed in human learning, were, notwithstanding that, in a capacity to discover his divine mission, and to understand and receive his doctrine, when as yet not any of the rulers had believed on him. And from this we have good reason to conclude, that the like simplicity, and sincere intentions of the heart, as was in the Apostles, and others of the first disciples, will always be sufficient to qualify those in low condition for discerning what is right and useful to their own particular salvation, though they may be destitute of other great advantages which those in higher

stations do enjoy.

Fourthly, FROM this discretionary judgment of all rational creatures, even the weightiest, and most important points are

not excepted.

FROM this language of our Saviour to the common multitude 'tis apparent, that there is no doctrine, however facred or fublime it may be thought, but what we may inquire into, and try whether it be of God, or men; and whether it be true or falle. If men are told, 'tis fundamental, and must therefore be received, and constantly maintain'd as such, without any contradiction or deviation from it, 'tis so much the more incumbent upon them to make good proof of it. In this case it behoves them not only to examine diligently whether it be true; but also, whether indeed it be a point of fuch importance as it is pretended to be. If both these things appear to them upon a full inquiry, their judgment will irrefistably declare for the affirmative; and if it appears otherwise, they will believe accordingly. And as it is urged upon them as of the utmost consequence, so they ought, for this very reason, to search into the truth of it with so much greater diligence, not daring to admit of it without fufficient evidence.

THE doctrines of God's decrees concerning the salvation of mankind, of original sin, of eternal punishments, of the holy Trinity, and several others, are often said to be of this high nature. Be it so; must they therefore be received under such terms or expressions

as some have thought fit to represent them by, without allowing men the liberty to examine, to explain, prove, or judge of them for the fatisfaction of their own consciences? Or, must they not be understood and receiv'd under fuch expressions as they are set forth in by the Scripture, and agreeably to the tenor of it, and also to reason and the divine Attributes? Must not therefore God's decrees be understood as being consistent with the express declarations of his universal goodness, and his will, that all should be fav'd, and alfo with our free agency? Must not what is call'd original fin be understood confistently with the boliness of God, and so, as not to impute fin unto him; or to believe that he imputes it to us, without any real or perfonal guilt on our part? And, must not eternal punishments be understood so, as to be confistent with the justice of God in rewarding every one according to bis works; and convincing the consciences of the ungodly, that they are the just recompence of their evil deeds, and the consequence of their fin and impenitence? Laftly, Must not the doctrine of the boly Trinity be understood and received only as it is taught in the Scripture-revelacion; and fo, as to secure the prime fundamental article both of natural and revealed religion, the supremacy and unity of God, The one God and Father of all, who is above all? Ephel. iv. 6.

WHAT danger can there be in such an examination, while men are guided by the

unerring principles of natural religion, and the fure word of God, in conformity thereto; while they remember always, that God is not only wife and powerful, but holy, just, and good, and that nothing contrary to these divine Attributes, or to the common sense and reason of mankind can possibly be true, or be the fense and substance of a divine revelation? The distribution of held

WHATEVER peculiar doctrines of Christianity men infift upon, as absolutely necessary to be embraced, and faithfully adhered to, they can't be more material than this before us in the text, viz. whether Jesus was the Christ, which we see plainly he referr'd to the private judgment of the common

people. o feer was modely , so or si congrai LET any particular doctrines of the Gospel be averr'd to be most essential and fundamental, and necessary to be known, it will by no means follow, from granting that pofition, that they are not strictly to be canvalfed and examined by every fingle person to whom the belief of them is supposed to be absolutely necessary. It follows on the contrary, that he ought to take fo much the greater pains in his inquiries, to be well affured of their truth, or credibility. The greater moment any thing is of, the greater mischiefs may arise from their mistakes about it. And when by a very nice and scrupulous examination of the proofs and arguments on all fides they have attained to a right notion of the matter, they will adhere more firmly to the truth, and have so much greater satisfaction in their consciences.

WHATEVER hath been said to prove mens right in lesser matters doth more effectually prove it in the greater; and therefore, tho' I might easily enlarge much further upon this head, I shall add no more, as judging this to be sufficient. I come now, therefore,

Fifthly, To answer such objections as may

be made against this doctrine. But,

HAVING, as I hope, effectually proved, That it is every man's right, and every man's duty too, to judge for himself in the business of religion, I must observe, that it is a vain thing to start objections against that which is once proved to be a plain and necessary duty. But however, since this doctrine hath been much opposed; and that this Christian liberty hath in some respects been more or less restrained in every Christian country, I shall consider some of the most plausible objections to this liberty, by those who plead for such restraints.

r. We are told, that such a liberty universally permitted and encouraged, is apt to fill mens heads with many salse, and dangerous, and heretical opinions. This weak objection is nothing to the purpose, for it proceeds only on supposition, that such a privilege may very possibly be abused. And are there any talents or advantages, possessed by creatures fallible and peccable, which are not liable to be perverted, and sometimes

turned to the prejudice both of the possessions, and other persons too? Immoralities in practice are as much, at least, if not more truly, owing to the liberty of our wills in acting, as errors in opinion are to our liberty of judging. Shall we therefore cavil at the divine goodness, in bestowing this privilege upon us, because there are so many who do most wickedly abuse it to their own damnation?

MEN are not to be deprived of their Christian liberty, nor the common people forbid the exercise of their own private judgments in matters of religion, because 'tis possible that in fo doing they may fometimes fall into great errors and mistakes; for if so, then fuch restraint must be laid indifferently upon all mankind of what rank or character foever, unless it can be proved, that some are always guided in their judgment and their practice by an infallible spirit, which no Protestant will pretend to who undertakes to vindicate this objection. In answer to it let me add this one thing further, That neither more, nor more groß and dangerous errors, are any where abounding, than in popish countries, where this liberty is violated in the most undisguised manner; and where the most severe restraints are laid upon it.

2. If this liberty be univerfally allowed without restriction, all persons will think they have a right to publish and defend what appears to them as truth, how false soever

it may be, and however contrary to the current principles which have the highest credit with their neighbours, and which have been long approved and fettled by authority - This some think a very insolent behaviour, and that it ought by no means to be countenanced or tolerated.

This is indeed a very natural consequence of the privilege we contend for. As Christians cannot justly-be denied the liberty to examine, without controll, into the truth of things, they must also have a right to publish all fuch useful and material truths, as they judge may ferve the interests of religion, and promote the happiness and salvation of their brethren.

THE principles and doctrines established by the articles and canons, or inferted into the publick liturgies of some particular church, are equally subject, with all things elfe, to this examination; and if any of them, upon a first and fair inquiry, shall appear to be false and finful, they may be contradicted and opposed. He who differs in opinion from that church, and thinks it is his duty to abstain from its communion, hath, no doubt, a right, with meekness and charity, to declare the reasons of his differt, and to offer arguments in confirmation of his own

As one who joins in constant communion with a church is not by this abridged of all his Christian liberty of judging what is right or wrong in that communion, so every imperfection

persuation.

perfection in the constitution or oeconomy of a church is not sufficient to justify a separation from it; for upon such a principle there could be no sufficient and permanent bond of external communion in divine offices in the Christian world, since 'tis probable that there neither is, or ever hath been any church without some error, since the days of the Apostles; nor ever will be, until the articles of saith, and forms of worship, are founded on the express declarations and do-

Ctrine of Scripture only.

ALL Protestant churches do with one voice disclaim infallibility: We leave that glory to the church of Rome, whose corruptions are fo great and many, that she especially, of all the churches in the world, can have no pretension to it. Now if it be confessed, that we are not free from errors, then certainly a man may be allowed to fee the faults of that church of which he owns himself to be a member, without a contradiction to his practice; and if he fees them, he may fpeak of them, without a breach of duty to it, provided he declares his thoughts with modesty and decency, and a due regard to the fentiments of others, and the just deference which he owes to his fuperiors.

HE cannot be an adversary to any church who modestly and discreetly looks into its errors, that he may avoid them; or who discovers them to others, that he may obtain amendment of them, and bring that church

with

with which he is united to a greater purity and perfection. d But, to solve adt equal vila

If he be a minister of that church, who hath subscribed to the truth of all its articles, and promised more especially to observe its canons, offices, and ordinances. Is he still at

liberty to object against them?

To this I answer, No Christian ever ought, and no Protestant ever does pretend to take the articles and decisions of his church for his rule of faith and practice; the will of God, as it is revealed in holy Scripture, is in these his only rule, and he can approve of nothing which he thinks not confonant to that great rule.

THE articles of religion in the church of Art. 6, England, and our offices of ordination, have 19, 20. expresly reserved this liberty to every one. He who is admitted to the office of a priest is obliged, by his express promise to the Bishop who ordains him, that he will be ready, with all faithful diligence, to drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines, contrary to God's word *. If therefore any such shall appear to him to be too much countenanced, even in his own communion, it is his duty to endeavour that they may be reformed, and utterly abolished.

3. THE permission of this liberty to examine, and controvert all matters of religion, is faid to occasion much confusion, and to break the church's peace, by opening a way

for herefy and schism.

VIII

Office for the Ordering of Priefts.

On the contrary, What can more effectually secure the peace of the church, than the allowing men this Christian liberty? How can men possibly differ about these matters, where this liberty is equally claimed, and

equally allowed on all fides?

WHERE nothing is imposed upon the common people but what is necessary for all men to believe and practife, in order to hold communion with their Fellow-Christians, there will be a way opened for a happy union among Christ's Disciples. There will be no just cause, and scarce any colourable pretence. for dividing from the communion of any national church, where matters merely spectslative are purged as much as possible out of those offices, which are designed for the use of the unlearned as well as others. The unnecessary mixture of abstruce theories in things intended for dally practice, ever was, and ever will be matter of offence, and the occasion of great hears and animosities.

LET every man be obliged to those things only which are most necessary to the faith and practice of a Christian, and the due and regular observation of all the holy ordinances, as they are plainly and undeniably revealed, and prescribed in the Gospel of Christ. Let him be permitted, as to other matters, to determine of his duty according to his own discretion (which is his most unalienable right) and most of our religious differences would in time be healed, especially if we take care to exercise that mutual cha-

rity and forbearance which the holy Gospel doth most indispensably require,

HAVING now, as I hope, fully cleared and confirmed the propositions I laid down, I shall conclude with some practical remarks

upon the whole.

1. We may observe upon this text, that tho' the Gospel contains the whole religion of a Christian, so that he cannot be obliged to receive any doctrine but what is there particularly expressed, or what appears to him to be the plain and evident consequence of some principle or precept to be found therein; yet the Old Testament may still be read and studied with very great advantage to us, as very useful to confirm our faith in Christ.

THE Prophets have uttered so many clear predictions concerning the time of Christ's appearance, and other circumstances which attended it; such descriptions of his person and condition in the world; of his birth and family, and his miraculous operations; that the common multitude might easily have discerned who he was. And he gave them a very sharp reproof, because they would not lay aside their prejudices, and impartially consider the evidences they had of his being the Messiah.

WE have now those antient prophesies, and by comparing them with the history of our Saviour, we may perceive they are all fulfill'd in him, and that they cannot be applied

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to any other person or event whatever. It is the duty of all who are qualified for fuch inquiries, diligently to examine into these things.

2. LET us confider the great humility and condescension of our Lord in thus appealing to the understandings of the common people, and submitting to the judgment of their con-

fciences the proof of his authority.

By this we may perceive, that he doth not impose any thing upon us, as a necessary article of our faith, but what our own judgment must comply with, if we studiously inquire, and confider feriously of the matter. This he intimates was the case of those to whom he applied himself in the words of my text.

Thus calmly did he reason with the Yews at other times: If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him. And when many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with bim:

Chap. vi. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye 66, 67. also go away? In which manner of address he conformed himself to the law of Moses, agreeably to the law of nature too, whereby life and death are fet before us; and we are left to our natural liberty of choofing either the one, or the other.

> 3. This may teach us, who are ministers of the Gospel, to copy this humility of our Lord and Master, that we, as the Apostles

John x. 37, 38. did, should use great plainness of speech; not 2 Cor. walking in crastiness, nor handling the word iii. 12. Chap. of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the in. 2. truth, commending our selves to every man's conscience in the fight of God.

4. If Christ hath not only permitted, but invited all men without distinction, to make proof of the truth of his religion, let us all thankfully accept this privilege, and use our utmost industry to attain the true knowledge. of itiylabal sud end find as 13

5. SINCE there are so many dark controversies in religion, that men of ordinary parts and learning are apt to be distracted in searching after truth, let them consider what hath here been faid, and they will find it a most healing doctrine, highly serviceable for the quieting their consciences; for if Christ commands them to judge of what is right; and if they cannot judge of what they do not understand, then 'tis plain that Christ doth not expect it from them. It is no more expected of them to believe what they cannot apprehend, than to practife what they are not able to perform,

6. SINCE all men, by Christ's permission, have an equal right in judging of those things which concern their religion, and are to be determined by their own consciences how they ought to worship God, why should one Christian censure and reproach another for differing from him in his judgment? Let Gal. vi. every man prove his own work, and then be 4,5. shall have rejoicing in himself and not in ano-

ther.

The common Christian's Right, &c.

ther. For every man shall bear his own burden.

We ought to consider well our own behaviour, for which only we shall be accountable; and whatever errors, or infirmities, other men may labour under, it becometh not us to insult over them upon that score, or to glory in the superiority of our understandings, or the supposed rectitude of our behaviour.

Lastly, Since Christ has thus indulged all men in the free use of their understandings, and their reasoning upon the holy Scriptures, it behoves them carefully to maintain this liberty, and not by any means to suffer their consciences to be enslaved by the imperious dictates of other persons. Stand fast therefore, brethren, in the liberty wherewith Christ bath made you free. And call no man Father upon earth: For one is your Father, who is in heaven.



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DISCOURSE XV.

The great Obligation of Christians to promote Truth and Charity.

EPHES, iv. 15.

Speaking the Truth in love.



HE prospect of our unhappy divisions both in church and state, is, undoubtedly, to all wise and good men, a very melancholy scene. The distracti-

ons we labour under upon that account are of late risen to a most exorbitant and uncommon pitch: These damp the joys of all those who wish well to Sion; they spoil the beauty, and interrupt the harmony of our most excellent constitution.

Nothing, I believe, hath ever contributed more to promote distraction in the church, than that most subtle, and malicious contrivance trivance of the devil, in fetting up one branch

of Christianity against another.

TRUTH and Charity are frequently contended for in contradiffinction to each other. whereas 'tis certain, that they are then most beautiful, and most useful to us, when they

are perfectly united.

THAT which I defire most earnestly to recommend, as one of the most sovereign remedies for our present distempers, is, the happy union of these two great pillars of our falvation, truth and charity, fo that neither of them may be forfaken or neglected by us; that we may not strive to make them clash with one another, but that we may always endeavour, according to this apostolical di-

rection, to speak the truth in love.

Some learned persons understand these words, as an exhortation to the Ephefians to be fincere in their profession of the faith. But I take them in the sense of our translators, as persuading Christians to a modest, friendly, and charitable behaviour one towards another, in debating those articles about which they differed. This I judge to be most agreeable to the context of the place before us; as also to the general design of this, and the greatest part of faint Paul's epistles, which feem chiefly to have been composed for healing the differences between the Jewish and 'Annosi- Gentile converts. The Greek participle here translated speaking the truth, is but once

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more to be met with in the whole New Te-Ann Oseiav stament, viz. Gal. iv. 16. where it plainly vuir. commying 2 fignifignifies telling them the truth; which makes it highly reasonable, that in this place also it should be referr'd to language, and bear the sense which is given to it in our English version.

From this interpretation of the words I shall take occasion to insist on these two things,

First, THAT we ought to hold and maintain the truth.

Secondly, THAT while we defend the truth, we ought to do it in such a manner as not to offend against the duty of love and charity towards those who forfake, or oppose the truth which we maintain.

First, WE ought to hold and maintain the truth. Whenever any true proposition is clearly laid before us, and rightly apprehended by us, our will must necessarily consent to it. No man can refuse to believe the truth, when he sees, and plainly apprehends it to be truth, for this implies a contradiction. What I judge, therefore, to be most useful under this head, is,

1. To examine wherein the nature of that truth confifts which we are oblig'd always to maintain and plead for.

2. To inquire how this duty comes to be neglected. And,

3. I SHALL offer some arguments tending to persuade men to stand up in vindication of

those

o The great Obligation of Christians

those truths which are most worthy of our Christian zeal.

christian zeal.

1. I SHALL examine wherein the nature of that truth consists which we are more especially oblig'd to maintain, and plead for.

The word truth is applied in holy Seripture to several senses; but most commonly in the New Testament, and particularly here in the text, it is to be understood of those divine truths which have been revealed, cleared up, and recommended by Jesus Christ; and these are such as are expressly contain'd in the Gospel of truth; illustrated and consumed by the death and resurrection of Christ; by the miraculous essuing of the Holy Spirit; and by the writings, lives and sufferings of the Apostles, and those other Disciples who co-operated with them in the propagation of their common faith.

THESE are the truths in general for which we ought especially to be concerned. But however, it is evident both from Scripture and Reason, that all truths contain'd in the writings of the New Testament, are not equally necessary to be known, or spoken of. This very Apostle, who here speaks of maintaining, or contending for the truth, bath made a manifest distinction in the case: He takes notice in his epistle to the Philippians, that there were some things, about which all Christians were then unanimously agreed; and other things, the certainty of which was

not evident to all believers. As to the truths which some believed, and others doubted of, he saith not a syllable of earnestly contending for them, but gives this general exhortation to them all, That they should make that truth, in which they all consented, the rule by which they ought to walk. Nevertbeles Phil. iii. whereto we have already attained, let us 16. walk by the same rule, let us mind the same

thing.

IT appears from hence, that each contending party did agree with unanimous confent in all those principles which were effentially necessary to the Christian faith, though there were some verities of Christianity which they on the one fide had not then a perfect knowledge of. That they were in a state of grace and favour with Almighty God, we cannot but conclude from the beginning of that epiftle, where the Apostle calls to his remembrance the happy progress they had made in Christian faith and practice, with great joy and thankfulness to God for it. Chap. i. z. Now this being the state and condition of the judaizing Christians at Philippi, who were yet ignorant of some truths, to the knowledge of which some other Christians had attained, it fully proves what I intended from it, That all religious truths are not equally necessary to be known.

THE effentials of Christianity may very easily be known by us; and yet no Christian must prefume that he is fuch a perfect scholar, as that he hath nothing more to learn.

Absolute persection is not to be attained by any creature. Our life on earth at least, if not our whole duration in a better world, is no other than a continual progression from one degree of knowledge and persection to another. The state of bliss hereaster shall be allotted to every one according to his attainments here on earth; so that besides the danger of losing what they had obtained, in case they should desist from making any surther progress, that would have been sufficient reason for saint Peter to exhort his Felter to exhort his Felter. Bet. iii. low-Christians to grow in grace, and in the

2 Pet.iii. low-Christians to grow in grace, and in the 18. knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

HAVING premised thus much, to shew that there is a necessary distinction to be made in respect of revealed truths, I come now to examine wherein the nature of that truth consists, which we are obliged more especially to maintain and plead for. And these I take to be the marks by which we may most readily discover it, viz. By its clearness and perspicuity; by the necessiry and importance of it; and by its influence upon our practice.

(1.) That truth which above all others we ought more especially to maintain and plead for, ought to be very clear and manifest. As far as any thing is obscure so far 'tis doubtful, and cannot therefore be assented to, in any certain determinate sense; for in that case, whatever sense a man shall fix upon he may possibly be mistaken, and 'tis but

fight-

fighting in the dark, under any fuch circumstances to contend for it.

No one ought to be over confident of the truth of any thing which he finds to be difputed, or denied by learned, wife and good Christians, who have given proofs that they have diligently searched into it, and who cannot justly be suspected of any base or temporal views in what they do advance.

But notwithstanding this, if the contrary to their sentiments appears to our understandings, upon mature examination of the matter, to be a very plain and certain truth, which it possibly may do; the question then will be, How must we behave our selves in such a case? To which I answer, That it certainly becomes us to conduct our faith and practice according to the sense which we have of it; but we should not by any means endeavour to impose it upon those who seriously profess they cannot apprehend it to be true.

Nothing can be plain to any one who hath not any clear distinct ideas of it in his mind; and he can't expect that others should yield their free assent to that which he proposes, unless he can express his thoughts concerning it in plain intelligible terms; for when the terms of any proposition are obscure and unintelligible, the proposition it self must consequently be so too, and then it is not reasonable to demand assent from others to it.

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ALL the effential doctrines of Christianity are plain and easy to be understood by men of ordinary talents; whatsoever therefore is obtruded upon the vulgar, and is not plain and easy to be understood by them, they may be satisfied it cannot be a necessary article of their faith. "The things which are necessary (says a late author) are intelligible of themselves, provided men bring an honest mind, and apply proper means; and in things not necessary men may entertain different opinions without hazard of their fouls *."

We are often told indeed, that we are obliged to believe fome things which are above our comprehension; that is to say, in other words, we must believe we know not what. But this proposition being thus placed in its true light, by a small variation of the terms, I hope will need no further consutation.

THE truth which our Apostle here intimates it is our duty to maintain, cannot be any thing which is incomprehensible by our understandings. He could never intend to bind upon mens consciences the belief of any doctrine which they could not understand, seeing we find him professing on the contrary, in the name of himself and his compani
2 Cor. ons, That they did use great plainness of iii. 12,13. Speech, and not as Moses, put a vail over his Chap. iv. face: And again, that by manifestation of the

^{*} Stanhope on the Gospel for Whitsunday, p. 116.

truth, they did commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. That is to say, they made the truth so clear, that every one might be determined by his own conscience concerning it, and his own private judgment would manifest and recommend it to him.

(2:) THE next rule by which we are to judge of such truths as are more especially to be defended and adhered to, is, That they are such as are necessary, and of great importance to be known. Though every truth is beautiful in its kind, and ought to be approved of by us, when we are led to the confideration of it, yet it is evident? from what I observed before of the distinction to be made between religious truths, that all truths are not equally necessary to be known or equally worthy of our care and study; and therefore when they are discovered, we need not labour to support and propagate them with the fame zeal and warmth as others which are more im-

themselves, and so absolutely necessary to be known by every Christian, that unless we have a competent understanding of them, and firmly believe them, the knowledge of all others will be of small significancy. The ignorance of these will shake the credibility of all the rest, for all the rest depend intirely upon them. They are the elements, or first Heb. v. principles of religion, out of which all other 12, 13.

T 2 doctrines

doctrines are compounded; they are the Heb. vi. foundation upon which the whole fabric stands; and this is the language by which they are distinguish'd from other Christian principles in the apostolic stile. 9150000 constituo

I SHALL give some instances of this both in natural and revealed religion. The fundamental articles of natural religion are, The belief of God's existence and unity; of his providence in governing the world; and, of that account which we must give to him

Chap. xi. hereafter. He that cometh unto God must believe that he is; and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently feek bim. - In the Christian revelation, the prime articles of

our faith are these. That Fesus is the Christ; I Cor. xv. 3. or, that the Father fent the Son to be the Sa-

viour of the world; that he juffered for our fins, and rose again for our justification; and, that he shall come again at the end of the world, to judge both the quick and dead -These articles, saint Paul saith, he delivered to the Corinthians (in westrois) as the chief and principal things to be believed - Thus

in practical religion also, Christ himself hath Matt.xxii.told us, that The first and great commandment 37, &c. is, To love the Lord our God with all our beart, and with all our foul, and with all our mind. And that the second is like unto it, to

love our neighbour as our selves.

(3.) THE third mark or character by which we may discover that truth which is most material to be known is, by its influence upon our practice. This is what the Apostle

means

means by wholsome words, and the doctrine Tim. vi. which is according to godliness, which he 3 commands Timothy to teach and exhort, in opposition to that soolish humour of doting Ver. 4, about questions and strifes of words. The like advice he gives again to him in the next epistle, That he should be careful to insist mainly upon those doctrines of Christianity, which are proper to encourage, and support Christians in their sufferings for the sake of Christ:

Of these things put them in remembrance, char-2 Tim. ging them before the Lord, that they strive not Ver. 14. about words to no prosit, but to the subverting of the hearers.

'Tis possible that all, or most religious truths, may some way or other, by a chain of inferences and consequential reasonings, though not directly and immediately, be reduced to practice, but they are not all equally conducive to it; they are not therefore absolutely necessary to promote virtue and holiness of life; for this is certain, that there are many good and pious men who are altogether ignorant of many speculative truths, which other Christians do very clearly understand; nay, I may considently affirm it, that the wisest and most understanding Christians have not the knowledge of them all, nor is it ne-

cessary that they should.

THE whole scope of all religion, and of the Christian in particular, is to rectify our nature, and purify our affections; to engage us in the practice of holiness and virtue, and

Tit. ii.

13, 14.

to make us wife unto falvation. All Scripture given by inspiration is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Herein consists the very essence of religion. Set but this one thing aside, and I may challenge any one to say, for what good use religion was designed, or what advantage it can be to us? To restify our nature, and make us better, was the thing intended by the best philosophy; and whatsoever hath a natural tendency to essect this, that is true and real virtue; as hath been justly observed, and very well express'd by an antient moralist *.

All the preachings and exhortations of our Saviour; all his institutions, precepts and commands, ultimately tend to this. This is the sole end of all the promises and threatenings of the Gospel. This was the principal design of Christ's coming into the world:

John iii. For we know that he was manifested to take

5: away our sins. All our rational and truly
Christian hopes are grounded upon this.

Ver. 3. Every man that hath this hope in him, buri-

3. Every man that bath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

This the Apostle expressly tells us is the whole drift of the Gospel-covenant; For the grace of God, that bringeth falvation, bath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should

Παν ηδό αμείνονα την Ιυχήν σοιά, τουτο όνηως αρείή,

live foberly, righteoufly, and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed bope, and the glorious appearing of the great God. and of our Saviour Jefus Christ; who gave bimself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good Works. Now.

IF to make us good and virtuous, holy and righteous, be the principal, and for aught appears, by the feveral passages here referr'd to, the fole intention of the Christian institution, I need fay nothing further to convince you, That the more immediately, and the more powerfully any truth or doctrine tends to this, it is fo much the more material to be rightly understood, and faithfully believed; and the more zealously and strongly to be infifted on, and propagated as much as

possible.

I HOPE I have here produced what may amount to a full proof, that there is a great and necessary distinction to be made between the feveral kinds of religious truths; and that feeing they are not all equally discoverable by us, nor all equally profitable to us when they are discovered, there cannot be more certain rules or characters given, by which we may determine what fort of truth that is which we should most resolutely stick to, and most earnestly maintain, than that which is clear and manifest, weighty and important, and very serviceable at least, if not absolutely necessary to promote piety and virtue.

THESE things, methinks, are highly reafonable in themselves, perfectly agreeable to the tenor of the Gospel, and to the practice and discourses borh of Christ and his Apostles. But, however evident and rational these things are, I am forry to observe, that they are directly contrary to the common practice of the world; for instead of those truths which are most perspicuous and momentous, and practical, the disputers of this world contend most earnestly and fiercely for things doubtful and obscure, if not utterly unintelligible; for those which are of very little moment and importance, and which have not the least tendency to promote found morality, or true Christian piety; nay, which are often erroneous and irreligious. And,

They who call out most loudly for adhering to the truth, and who are most forward to censure, and revile, and persecute, to excommunicate and damn their brethren for their supposed errors, are such as pay the least regard to these directions, and are most impatient of contradiction from those who desire to be guided in their desence of truth by these very rational and Christian

rules.

As it is at the present, so hath it also been from very antient times. The Christian world hath too often been put into a flame about about mere questions and strifes of words, and about matters not at all profitable, having no tendency to edify the church in Christian holiness and virtue.

Ecclesiastical history gives a very melancholy account of the troubles and disorders occasioned by introducing into one of the antient creeds the term Homobusios (consubstantial.) Even they who did not refuse their affent to it, were so far divided in their judgments about the sense of it, as mutually to charge each other with Sabellianism on the one hand, and Arianism on the other *. Gregory Nazianzen complain'd, that in the dispute concerning two other strange terms in the doctrine of the Trinity great disturbances were occasioned, so that, as he saith, The ends of the earth were almost torn as funder by a few syllables †.

THE like happened also in after ages, from the addition of other human terms in the public forms of worship, which have been found as hard to be explained or understood; and the consequences have been every jot as fatal and destructive of the church's peace, how intelligible soever the words may be, if the doctrine they contain is of a very doubtful and disputable nature.

^{*} Socrat. E. H. lib. 1. c. 23. Theod. l. 2. c. 3. Sozom. l. 2. c. 18.

[†] Κινθυνεύει συναπορόαγίωας ταις συλλαβαις τὰ πέραία. Nazianzen. oraț, de laude Athanas. apud op. Athanas. fol, 24.

IT was a very just observation made several years ago by our now most reverend metropolitan, that, "It has never gone well " with the church of Christ, fince men have " been so narrow spirited as to mix the con-" troverses of faith with their public forms of se worthip; and have made their liturgies, " instead of being offices of devotion to God, " become tests and censures of the opinions of " their brethren !."

To this remark I shall take the liberty to add another, which indeed is nothing more than the plain consequence of the former, That we can have no good reason to expect that bleffed union among Christians, which we wish and pray for, till every particular national church shall think fit to expunge out of their public fervices all fuch disputable passages, as create scruples in the minds of those who agree in all plain and fundamental doctrines, and fincerely defire to be at peace and unity, and, if they can with a safe conscience, to hold communion with their brethren in all religious offices.

IT is not only from this foolish humour of striving earnestly for things doubtful and obscure, that Christians have been so often fet together by the ears, upon the false prerence of being zealous for the truth. The like mischief hath also frequently befallen

[†] Dr. Wake's Sermons, p. 195.

them, by contending flereely one against another, about very flight and trivial matters, which however certain or intelligible they may appear to some persons, yet being but of small confequence in themselves, and having no proper influence upon practice, a Christian cannot justly be reproved, if he doth not feem to be very zealous in difputing for them, ere more comentary gritter

THE Bible contains a large collection of religious truths; and all those who apply themselves to the study of this book may attain to a competent understanding of such as are most considerable: of such especially as are most necessary, and most conducing to the practice of a holy and virtuous life. But no man living can prefume to fay, that he hath a perfect understanding of them all; from whence it plainly follows, that if they are all equally necessary to salvation, no man living can be faved. But.

IF falvation may be had without a perfect universal knowledge of all Scripturetruths, why then should one Christian quarrel with another about such as are of doubtful interpretation; and which, comparatively speaking, are of no great consequence, in what fense soever they are taken, and which do not tend directly to the increase of piety and virtue? Why should we vex and torment our brethren about things, which, to them at least, appear to be of a very intricate and dubious meaning, of which they do profess they cannot see the necessity or importance; and which they cannot by any means apprehend as any way conducing to the improvement of their nature? To how much better purpose should we bestow our time and pains, in persuading men to consider seriously those Christian verities, which are more evident in themselves, and more important in their consequences, and which have a natural and visible tendency to make them wifer and better Christians?

LET him who thinks himself obliged to stand up stoutly in defence of Christian truth, lay his hand upon his heart, and consider seriously with himself, whether, at the hour of his death, and the great day of his appearance before his judge, the notions which are either not so evident, or so important, or so conducive to a good life, will yield him equal satisfaction with those other principles which are clear and uncontested, and which all allow to be of great moment in themselves, and highly serviceable, if not absolutely necessary for promoting piety?

I FEAR it will then give but very little pleasure to any one, who reflects upon his past behaviour, to find that he hath employed the utmost of his zeal, in strenuously afferting, and rigidly imposing upon others, his own speculative, and, perhaps,

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erroneous opinions, concerning the meta-phyfical nature and attributes of Almighty God, if he hath bestowed little or no pains in bringing men to conformity to the purity of the divine nature, according to the most just and rational ideas which we have of all God's moral attributes; and of those especially which are relative to us - It will give but small consolationto him, that he hath contested warmly for modes and ceremonies, for babits and gestures, and for narrowing the bounds of the Christian church by unscriptural forms of faith and worship, and for making these the terms of Christian communion, while he is conscious to himself that he hath not studied with greater, or with equal application, to instil the love of God, and of our neighbour, into the hearts of men.

It is not to be doubted, but that he would then find more folid comfort in his breaft, for having made one fingle convert to the plain and necessary duties of Christianity, and to those doctrines which do more especially lead to them, than that he had engaged a thousand to contend zealously for doubtful and disputable, for less material, or merely

speculative notions.

LET it therefore be our special care, in contending for the truth, to shew a great regard for those things which are most evident, and most important, and most conducing to a holy life. Finally, brethren, what-

Joever

foever things are true, what soever things are honest, what soever things are just, what soever things are just, what so ever things are pure, what soever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

to him, that he harh concessed warmly for modes and ceremonies, for paints and getter in and for narrowing the bounds of the Christian church by unferiptural forms of faith and worlding and for making these the terms of the conference of the conf

It is not to then find me would for having may be some for having may be some charge of the sould more effectially lead to them, then the solution of the content to the solution of the solutions.

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Like it therefore be our foecial care, in contending for the truth, to them a great regard for those things which are most evident, and not conductent, and not conducted the hely lift. Fine of brethren, what to the hely lift.



DISCOURSE XVI

The great Obligation of Christians to promote Truth and Charity.

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HE Christian religion is the truth in general which the Apostle here exhorts us to contend for; but as that contains a great variety of doctrines, precepts, and com-

mands, it hath been shewn, that in it there are some things of greater consequence than others, and as such most worthy of our chief concern; and they are particularly those which are most intelligible, and most important, and which have the greatest instruence upon our practice: These are the things which all Christians are more especially obliged openly

for. I proceed now,

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Secondly, To inquire, how this duty comes to be so much neglected, whilst things of lesfer moment are the common subjects of our most warm debates. To satisfy this inquiry I shall point out some particulars which I conceive to be the chief impediments to the performance of this duty; and they are fuch as these, vicious inclinations; a careless indifferency in matters of religion; negligence or flothfulness; pride and obstinacy; prejudice and prepoffession; popular esteem; fear and cowardice; interest, and worldly hopes and expectations; deference to authority;

false notions of the churches peace.

(1.) THE first, the most general, and most prevailing of all impediments, or obstructions to the knowledge and free profession of the truth here spoken of, is vice; nothing doth so much blind the eyes of men, and cloud their understandings, as their vicious inclinations. Their love to vice hinders them from discovering, and consequently from embracing and professing the great and most important truths of Christianity. This affertion is both confirmed, and explained by what our Lord hath told us, concerning the reception which he met with at his first appearance in the world, tho' he came with all the evidence. which could possibly be given, that he was indeed the true Messiah and the Son of God; yet this light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. This, he faid, vinsgo

John i. 5.

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did not proceed from any natural defect in their understandings, but from the depravity of their wills, and from their finful Af-fections. They loved darkness rather than John iii. light, because their deeds were evil. For eve- 19, 20. ry one that doeth evil bateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. And the like observation was made afterwards by St. Paul, That mens defire to indulge their lufts, and vicious affections, was that which brought them under fuch a frong delufion, and fuch a damning error, as to believe a lie; and to reject the truth 2 Thes.ii. after it had been fully and clearly laid before 11, 12. them. They believed not the truth, faith he, but bad pleasure in unrighteousness.

(2.) ANOTHER cause of men's neglecting this duty is, a careless indifferency in matters of religion. This hath a very near relation to the former cause; for they who are in love with fin will not be much concerned for religious truths; and they, again, who think religious matters not worth enquiring after, are so much the more at liberty to follow the chase of sinful Pleafurespring an in drod unthindown a tedescoto

THEY who are thus unconcerned about religion in general, are no otherwise to be accounted of than as practical atheists, who difbelieve at least the providence of God, and the future state of rewards and punishments; and therefore these deserve no further consideration in this place. But, realonablenets of what they are commanded

THERE is another fort of indifference which is professed by some persons who call themselves believers, and who presend to hope for that falvation which is promifed in the Gospel. These imagine, that it is a thing indifferent with what fociety of Christians they unite themselves, provided the effentials of Christianity are maintained among them. But this is certain, that without a first examination of their principles and practices, a man can have no good affurance that the body of pretended Christin ans to which he joins himself is not infected with some dangerous and poisonous distemper, which may prove destructive to him. but had bleasure in war in breakfull.

THERE have been some in anticat times pretending to the greatest purity and perfection in faith and worthing whom afterages have cenfured as most unworthy of shole claims. There is one fociety at prefent, of a very large extent, infolently affurning to it felf the flile and title of the only catholic and truly Christian churchs of which we have too much cause to judge, that it is altogether antichristian both in its principles and practices. This church, we know, is a professed enemy to a strict and diligent inquity; and to keep the people in ignorance. and prevent their discovering the many frauds and impostures it is guilty of they are deterr'd as much as possible from examining freely and impartially into the truth and reasonableness of what they are commanded THERE.

to believe and do, by inflicting upon offenders in this point death and tortures the most

exquisite and intolerable.

'Tis undoubtedly a Christian's duty to worship God in the most edifying and perfect manner which he can attain to. And fince the feveral communities professing the religion taught by Christ have mutually charged each other with many errors and mistakes in their faith and worship; and fince 'tis plain, that fome have more, and some have fewer errors of this kind, it is evident, that, however favourable we may be in our fentiments of others, it becomes us to join in communion with that fociety which we judge to be the least corrupted; where God may be served in a method most agreeable to his will, and which we think will most conduce to the edification of our felves and others; fo that it cannot be a thing indifferent with what fociety we communicate in religious offices.

(3.) In a near affinity with the careless and indifferent, are those who think it is enough to make some slight and superficial searches into the arguments and proofs by which the religion they profess may be confirmed and defended. He who will not take sufficient pains to be well informed upon what good bottom his faith stands, will easily permit it to be wrested from him, when he comes to be attacked by an expert and cunning adversary: Such as these are no way qualified to make a strenuous and successful opposition U 2

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against the crast and policy of those persons

who lie in wait to deceive.

A FULL and perfect knowledge can never be the portion of the flothful; it is to be obtained by no other methods, fince miracles are ceased, than by a painful and laborious search after it; by a close application of the mind to it, without ceasing our inquiries till we are well established in the grounds of our religion, so that we shall be ready always to

1 Pet. iii. religion, so that we shall be ready always to 15. give an answer to every man that asketh us a

reason of the hope that is in us.

THE persuasion of those who will be at no confiderable pains to weigh the arguments by which it is supported, is not a proper faith, but vain credulity. The rectitude of their principles hath no merit in it. The errors of the industrious, who are sincerely defirous of attaining to the truth, are more commendable than their orthodoxy. When therefore we advanced this notion, That all truths essentially necessary to salvation are plain and easy to be understood by men of common apprehensions, no man justly can from thence infer, that there are not many other verities worthy of our learned and most elaborate inquiries. 'Tis the duty and interest of those, who by their nature, birth, and education, are happily furnished with proper talents and opportunities, to extend the bounds of their possessions as far as they are able, in this wide and fruitful field of Christian knowledge.

(4.) ANOTHER great obstruction to the due performance of this duty, is, pride and obstinacy. I join these two particulars under one general consideration, because of the very near alliance which is between them, for pride is seldom unaccompanied with an obstinate and untractable disposition; and obstinacy may be reputed, what for the most part it will be found to be, the daughter of pride. This appears in the character of Dio-3 John, trephes, who would not receive the truth preached by the Apostles, because he loved to have the pre-eminence.

They who are puffed up with an high conceit of their own present attainments; who are wise in their own eyes, and lean too much unto their own understandings, are very apt to hear with much distain whatsoever is offered for their conviction, by such as appear inferior to them either in worth or understanding. Whence bath this man this Matt. wisdom? was a taunting speech of those xiii. 54. proud insulting persons in the Synagogue, who distained to receive instruction from the

mouth of Christ.

PRIDE is apt to make men insolent in their behaviour, and manner of communicating to other persons those truths which they either have, or which they think they have attained to. They treat men with indignity, by diffating, and prescribing to them, in a dogmatical and imperious manner, the sentiments they have of things, when they should endeavour to persuade and convince their

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judgments, by laying before them, in a modest and sedare way, the arguments and reasons which led them into those opinions. Men, most certainly, are never very forward to receive instruction from such as treat them

with contempt and arrogance.

Pfal, xxv give them a discerning heart: And the meek will he is first professors.

teach his way.

them unto babes.

As Christianity is an utter enemy to pride, so pride stands up in opposition to the truth of Christianity. Our Lord sound this upon his publishing the Gospel; and accordingly he remarks upon it, in his address to God, when he declared his joy for the success he met with among those of a contrary disposition: I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed

21.

Luke x.

He therefore who regards the Apostle's exhortation in the text, to maintain and plead for truth, must have a due regard to the direction he hath given us in another place, Mind not high things: But condescend to men Rom. xii. of low estate. And be not wife in your own 16. conceits.

(5.) ANOTHER great adversary to truth, is, prejudice or prepossession. I shall not here infift upon that wicked and dishonest inclination of the heart, which makes men wilfully and obstinately to adhere to known prejudices, and to stickle hard for those errors and falshoods which they themselves are conscious of. To plead with such as these is labour loft; there is no probability of success. But, if any man be a lover of truth, and defires in good earnest to come to the knowledge of it, and to embrace it when it is difcovered, let him beware of those prejudices which he may unwarily have taken up, without sufficiently attending to them; I mean those prepossessed opinions, which custom and education have made familiar to him; and which, without a due examination, he hath been used to look upon as most undoubted verities.

Most men are biassed in their judgments by these unheeded prejudices; these are commonly instilled into them in their very infancy, either by the ignorance, or designs of them by whom they have been taught the rudiments of religion. Books of catechetical instructions have been often made the instru-

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ments of leading men into very great and most notorious errors; and the larger expofitions, or pretended explanations of them, instead of explaining the obscure and doubtful passages, and clearing up mistakes, have but too frequently increased the number of them.

To instruct our children, and other ignorant persons, in the first and most essential principles of Christian faith and practice, is, without dispute, a thing very commendable in it self, and a duty highly incumbent upon Christian parents, governors, and teachers, and extremely profitable, if done discreetly and impartially; but, if instead of teaching them the most necessary and fundamental principles of Christianity in general, we strive to preposses them with the particular opinions of any one certain sect or party only, as is too customary with most instructors, this method is very culpable, and greatly prejudicial to the truth.

Useful and good instructions are themselves no better than mere prejudices in those
persons who embrace and vindicate them, as
truths received from others, without a just
examination of their weight and certainty,
by inquiring into the evidence and importance of them, and searching the Scriptures
daily, whether these things are so or no.
They who take upon them to instruct the
young and ignorant in their Christian duty,
ought honestly to inform them, that as they
do increase in years and understanding, they
must

must examine for themselves, whether all these things which they have been taught be contained in Scripture, or at least be intirely conformable thereunto.

(6.) THE next great enemy to truth which I shall mention, is popularity, or too great a defire of popular estimation. He who prefumes, though with the utmost force of argument and reason, to contradict the opinions which are most current with the people, must expect a storm of ignominy and reproach; their language is, Away with such Acts xxii. a fellow from the earth: For it is not fit that 22. be should live. To avoid this treatment, many useful and most important truths are oftentimes concealed, by those who dare not hazard their reputation for the fake of truth. This feems to have been the chief obstacle to the conversion of the Pharisees, who had obtain'd a great esteem among the Yews, which they feared to lofe if they should openly declare for our Saviour and his doctrine; on which account Christ thus expostulated with them, How can ye believe, who receive John v. bonour one of another, and seek not the bonour 44. that cometh from God only? Among the chief rulers, we are told, that Many believed on bim; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess bim, lest they should be put out of the Chap. Synagogue: For they loved the praise of menxii.42,43. more than the praise of God.

(7.) FEAR and cowardice is another grand obstruction to the propagation of the truth. It is well known by those who are but moderately

derately read in antient history, that many timorous souls, though fully assured of the truth of Christianity, were yet prevailed upon, through fear of sufferings, to deny their Saviour, deliver up their Bibles, and offer facrifice to idols. These are they whom our

Matt. xiii. Lord spake of in the parable, who hear and 20, 21. receive the word with joy; but when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Luke word, they are offended. Or, as saint Luke viii. 13. expressent it, In time of temptation fall

away.

THE same cowardly disposition hath, in latter ages, caused many learned and discerning persons to suppress those weighty truths of which they had made a very clear discovery; and made others openly to retract those which they had before published, and fill approved of in their consciences. A remarkable instance we have of this, in the Jearned and eminent father Paul of Venice, who being compelled to fign a recantation of some pretended errors in his writings, for fear of falling into the hands of merciles inquifitors, confessed his weakness to a certain minister of state in private, frankly telling him, " Every one is not indued with the fpi-" rit of Luther."

WE may therefore very confidently affirm, That Christian fortitude is a virtue absolutely necessary for the support of Christian truth. If its first professors had been destitute of this virtue, Christianity would have made but very little progress in the world: Their doctrine

Arine would very soon have been suppressed, if they had not had the courage and resolution to suffer greatly in defence of it. One of these two things was unavoidable, they must have been contented to forsake either their lives or their religion. This their blessed Master plainly did foresee would be the case, and accordingly took care to caution them about it. I say unto you, my friends, be Luke not asraid of them that kill the body, and after xii. 4.5. that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him,

(8.) INTEREST and worldly hopes and expectations, are a further bar to the discovery and propagation of Christian truths. As temporal discouragements on the one hand, do oftentimes deter men from advancing such truths as were defigned to be discountenanced thereby; so also on the other hand, it is too plain to be denied, that no small numbers, even of discerning persons, are drawn in, through worldly expectations, to give their fuffrages for gainful errors. There were fome, even in the days of the Apostles, who dared to corrupt, or make merchandize of 2 Cor. the word of God for gain: It was gain which ftirr'd up that violent opposition against the Christian doctrine from Demetrius, and the other filversmiths at Epbesus. Saint Paul Acts xix. found by sad experience, that the generality 24, &c. of Christians in the city of Rome were more nearly

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nearly concerned for their own private interest and security, than for the spreading of Phil.ii.21 the Gospel; that they all sought their own, and not the Things which were Jesus Christ's. Such were they also whom saint Peter speaks 2 Pet.ii. of, who forsook the truth, because, like Ba-

2 Pet. ii. of, who forfook the truth, because, like Ba15. laam, they loved the wages of unrighteousness.
Where honours and preferments, wealth and reputation, are attendant upon errors, those errors can hardly fail to have many followers

and advocates; and the truths which are accompanied with poverty and difgrace, violence and perfecution, in a degenerate age,

will find but very few abettors.

(9.) Too great a deference to man's authority is frequently the cause why men renounce the truth. As many are too apt on the one hand, to rife up against the just authority of those whom God hath set over them, for the preservation of their temporal interests; so there are not a very few of those who pay fuch an unlimitted fubmission to their superiors, as to render up to them even their consciences and understandings. This may be faid of all those who make the decisions of their governors, whether civil or ecclefiaftical, the fole measure of their faith. Such an abject flavery as this is openly avow'd in all the countries in subjection to the papal tyranny. And they contend for nothing lefs, who require men to fubmit their judgments to those articles of religion which have been determined by their rulers, without prefuming to examine whether they be true or false; or

at least, without daring to declare against them, if after due examination they perceive them to be erroneous. But, as magistrates are no more infallible than their subjects; nor synods of ecclesiastics any more than private Christians; it must therefore be a mighty disadvantage to the free progress of Christian truth and knowledge, if men are obliged to submit their judgments to their fallible decrees.

HUMAN authority cannot possibly be the standard of religious truths. Divine verities are derived from none but God; and to him only we are accountable, either for rejecting, or embracing them. Truth is discovered only by the understanding; 'tis by that we must be guided in the choice of our opinions; and here authority can have no place. It may, in feveral cases, command the obedience of our wills, and the conformity of our outward actions; but it can lay no force upon our understandings; it hath no direct influence upon them; whatever we are commanded to the contrary, we shall still judge of things according to our apprehensions of them; "For (as a late learned prelate truly fays) " that which commands our understanding, " and hath got authority there, hath a right " to govern our will, and command the " whole man: And therefore we had need " take care what we suffer to seat it self in " that throne, for according as our opinions and judgments are, so will our inclinations

" be, both in our affections and in our " lives *."

In the learch after truth it is a most ridiculous thing, to put us off with authority instead of argument, as if it were in the power of men, or any societies of men to fix, or alter the eternal laws of truth and falshood, and by giving it their stamp, to make that, which is but weak and sophistical, become good and current reason-

ing

(10.) THE last particular which I shall here take notice of, as a great impediment in the way of truth, is, A falle notion of the church's peace. They who upon this account are most apt to be deterr'd from contending openly for fuch principles as they believe to be both true, and useful to be known and propagated, are fuch as have no true and clear ideas either of the church, or of the church's peace, having entertain'd very narrow and partial notions both of the one, and of the other: They conceive of the church as of a certain party, distinguish'd from the bulk of Christians by some particular creeds, or articles of religion, composed by men fallible in their judgments; by modes and forms of outward worthip, and the like: Sometimes they mean their governors both civil and ecclefiaftical; and fometimes they confine it to the clergy only, exclusive of all

^{*} Patrick's Witnesses to Christianity, Vol. I. c. 9. p. 551.

others who believe in Christ, and worship

God according to his Gospel.

Their notions also of the church's peace are equally precarious and mistaken: What they take for peace is often meant of nothing else but a privilege to establish and maintain erroneous doctrines, without any opposition or disturbance from such as may discover them. But if this deserves the name of peace, it is such a peace as cannot be accounted either safe or honourable; you may call it rather sleep or lethargy, or what you please, but let it not be dignissed with a stile and title of which it is so very undeserving. But,

3. LET us never be too backward in maintaining and pleading, as occasion offers, for those truths which we judge to be most worthy of our Christian zeak. That we are not under any obligation to contend for things trifling or intignificant, fruitless or unedifying, doubtful or unintelligible, bath been faid already; but when the doctrines we maintain, in opposition to those which may happen to be more commonly received. are fuch as do appear to us to be very profitable; and especially, if they seem to have a most immediate influence upon our Christian worthip or practice, let us never scruple, according to the opportunities and abilities which God hath given us, to promote thefe as much as possible, by all charitable and Christian methods, whatever provocation or distur-

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disturbance it may give to those who hold the

Clear of analysis for

contrary opinions.

IF a controverly arises concerning matters purely speculative, so that a man may be equally holy and righteous, which part foever he takes in the dispute; or if the question be concerning only the expediency, or inexpediency of things injoin'd us; in these, and fuch like cases, I see no just occasion to make a great disturbance in maintaining our opinions, either on the one fide, or on the other. But in all disputes, where the honour of God, the happiness of our Christian brethren. and the peace of conscience is concerned, it is not only justifiable, but commendable to contend earnestly for that which we are firmly persuaded is the truth.

IT is no indifferent matter, whether mercy and facrifice. viz. Whether moral duties and mere positive precepts be of equal obligation; whether God will accept the fincere endeavours of his servants, to think and act according to his will; whether a Christian shall be accepted or refused, when he hath done his utmost rightly to understand, and faithfully to perform his Maker's pleasure; in a word, whether it be necessary to the fafety of our condition, that we have an infallible certainty of the rectitude of our judgments; or whether that be true which faint

1 John ii. John affirms, Hereby do we know that we know bim, if we keep bis commandments. " In such important points as these it cannot be presumed, that men are bound to silence; nor is it just and reasonable, that herein their Christian liberty should be restrained.

THE connection of the text, with the verse immediately preceding it, shews the necessity, not only of keeping or holding the truth in our hearts; but more particularly it must import, in order to prevent our brethren from being toffed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, that we should be so friendly to them also as to speak the truth, and publish what we know of all the most important articles of faith, together with the arguments and reasons of our perfuafion, that we may engage them in like manner to embrace those articles of found doctrine, and to prevent their falling into any dangerous errors; or, as it is there expressed, to keep them from being toffed to and fro; which uncertain wavering, in fuch points, is undoubtedly a most unsafe, and uncomfortable condition.

It does therefore mightily concern us all, to stand in the ways and see, where is the good Jer. vi.16; way, and walk therein, that we may find rest to our souls. This was a command of God to his people under the law of Moses; and I think it would be madness to suppose that God is less concerned for the truth of that religion which he hath manifested to us by his own Son, whom he bath appointed heir of all Heb. i. 23 things. Saint Jude therefore declared to all

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The great Obligation, &c.

Jude, Ver. 3. that were sanctified, and called to profess the faith of Christ, that it was needful for him to write unto them, and exhort them, that they should earnestly contend for the faith which was once (once for all) delivered unto the saints.

LET neither vice, nor carelesness, nor slothfulness, keep us from our duty; let neither pride, nor prejudice, blind our judgments; let not popular esteem cajole us; nor sear and cowardice deter us from giving testimony to the truth; let us not be bribed by interest, nor sway'd by man's authority; nor scared by any superstitious apprehensions of the church's peace, from a bold and seasonable desense of all important truths: But let us hold safe the profession of our faith without wavering; striving together for the faith of the Gospel.



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DISCOURSE XVII.

The great Obligation of Christians to promote Truth and Charity.

The second of the contraction of the contracti

directions which is I'm EPHES iv. 15.

Speaking the Truth in love.

HE text, as I have observ'd upon it, contains these two general propositions,

First, THAT we ought to hold and maintain the truth.

Secondly, THAT we ought to do it in such a manner as not to offend against the duty of love and charity.

I HAVE inquired into, and at large explained the nature of that truth which the Apostle speaks of; examined the several causes of mens neglecting their duty in this particular; and then concluded that first head X 2 with

with some arguments and exhortations to the practice of it. I proceed now,

Secondly, To shew, that while we defend the truth, we ought to do it in such a manner as not to offend against the duty of love and charity. To this end I shall propose four things, which whoever is convinc'd of can hardly fail to act according to his duty in this case.

1. By this method we shall best consult

our own fafety and reputation.

2. This is the likeliest way to promote the interest of the truth which we main-

3. It is most agreeable to the precepts and directions which are given us in the blessed Gospel.

4. To the practice and example both of

Christ and his Apostles.

That to vindicate the truth which we maintain in the spirit of love and charity towards those who differ from us, tends most both to our own safety, and reputation too. The rule of charity which I am recommending in this place, regards either our words or writings against others; or else our actions and behaviour towards their persons: In both these cases we shall best consult our safety by observing it; and most expose our selves to danger in going contrary to this good rule—

That bitter and reproachful language is apt to inslame mens passions, and bring us under

under their resentments, is a thing too plain to be disputed —— And to afflict and persecute them for their opinions, is the ready way, without all controversy, to provoke them to retaliate the like usage upon us again, whenever they shall find a proper opportunity. And as for that, no mortal can be sure, that such a revolution will not happen as

may put it in their power.

THE severities which were brought upon the Arians by those who called themselves the Orthodox, in the reign of Constantine the Great, were repay'd with usury upon their own heads in some of the succeeding reigns, when they of the other party had got the Emperors on their fide. The ecclesiastical historians give a very tragical account, how these two parties did mutually revile and persecute each other, for some centuries; so that they banished, beat, and tortur'd, and, in a word, they did butcher one another in their turns, with such inhuman fury and barbarity, as did at least equal, if not exceed, even the cruelty of their Heathen persecutors.

WHILE a mild, and placable, and forgiving temper; a gentle, tractable disposition; love, charity, and benevolence; patience and forbearance, meekness, and condescension to mens infirmities, a readiness to overlook and pardon their mistakes, and to pass a favourable censure upon their actions and designs, are esteemed as rational and commendable qualities; as long as these are accounted mo-

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ral virtues, and stand recorded and approv'd of in the Gospel; and while their contraries are held as vices and blemishes in the characters of men, and bring a blot and stain upon the religion they profes (which will for ever be the case, as long as either Christianity subsists, or men continue to be rational) so long will this method of pleading for the truth, in the spirit of love, procure them a just and honourable reputation among wise and discerning persons; and to contend for it in a way of passion, satyr and invective, will tend directly to ruin and destroy it.

2. To speak the truth in love is always the likeliest way to promote the interest of the truth which we maintain. He who goes about to plead the cause of truth, will never do it in any method contrary to the duty of love and charity, if he be truly and fincerely possessed with such a just concern for the truth it felf as he ought to be; and hath, indeed fuch a real veneration for it as he pretends to have. This will certainly be the method he will take, if he doth in earnest prefer the interest of truth to his own humour, or vanity, or passion, or the gratisication of other mens violent and unreasonable passions; or to any worldly advantages, or fecular defigns. He who hath fuch a zeal for truth as furmounts all these considerations, will certainly avoid all those methods which are in any measure likely to obstruct the propagation of the truth; this will make him carefully to consider at what time, before what what persons, under what circumstances it will be most proper to propose it. He will imitate the children of this world, who, when they are engaging others in their party, never fail, according to their judgment and capacity, to contrive and practife all the proper methods of persuasion; and especially, they will make it their chief business to recommend themselves to the good opinion and esteem of those they labour to engage. He who doth expect that his arguments should prove successful in confuring those whom he supposes in an error, will be careful to address them in such a manner as to gain a favourable hearing; and if he hopes to be heard with patience, and a due attention, it is absolutely necessary that he should convince them, in the first place, that what he undertakes is out of a real good-will towards them, and a friendly compassion for the injury they do themselves by adhering to their errors.

It would be the furest way to gain advantage to their cause, as well as reputation to themselves, if all Christians, when they plead for those important truths on which our present and our future happiness depends, would, in the first place, endeavour to recommend themselves to the good opinion of those they argue with, by discovering, both in the mildness of their language, and the sweetness of their behaviour, that they have a brotherly affection for their persons, and that they are not rashly prejudiced in the

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notions

notions and opinions they themselves have entertained. And furely there is nothing so engaging, and that carries so forcible a conviction with it, as a strong and solid argument dressed in the cornely ornaments of

obliging, foft, and mild expressions.

3. This method of proceeding is most agreeable to the precepts and directions which are given us in the bleffed Gospel. The precepts which our Lord hath given us are such as tend immediately to subdue our passions, and foften our dispositions. What he chiefly recommends to his disciples is poverty of spirit, meekness, mercy, &c. He is so far from permitting us, upon any score, much less therefore for errors in opinion only, to revile, or perfecute our brethren, that he hath pronounc'd his bleffing upon those who shall suffer themselves with patience to be reviled, and persecuted, and evil spoken of, for the fake of him, and of his truth and righteousness.

When he appointed his Disciples to preach the Gospel to the nation of the Jews, he warned them beforehand of that ungrateful treatment they would meet with; Behold, I send you forth, as sheep in the midst of wolves; and yet this was the direction which he gave them for their conduct, That they should govern their behaviour with a decent mixture of caution and simplicity; Be ye therefore

Ver. 16. of caution and simplicity; Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. In the former clause he recommends to their imitation neither the venom nor the bissing,

but

Matt. x. 16. but the wisdom only of the serpent; and by the latter they were more especially injoin'd an innocent and unblameable conversation; to abstain from all offensive carriage, and such language as tended to exasperate mens passions, and cause them to entertain a prejudice either against their doctrine or their persons.

CHRIST'S Apostles paid a due reverence to these instructions of their Master, and did very frequently and earnestly repeat them to their Fellow-Christians; and especially to those whom they associated with themselves in the work of the ministry, for the speedier propagation of the Christian faith. Thus Peter declares in general, what directions Christ had given for their conversation among: Pet. ii. the Gentiles; That whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. For so is the will of God (says Ver. 15-the) that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Thus also our Apostle, in the beginning of this chapter, with much importunity, intreats the Christians of the church of Epbesus, by his own sufferings, for the sake of Christ, and for the honour of their profession, that their behaviour should be with all gentleness and charity towards each other, notwithstanding any difference in their judgments and opinions. I therefore the prisoner Ver. 1, 2, of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy 3.

of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with

all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And after many other precepts and exhortations, besides that mentioned in the text, he ends the chapter in the same strain:

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, 32. even as God for Christ's sake bath forgiven

you.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of his epistle to the Romans, where he treats at large concerning the differences then on foot between the Jewish and the Gentile converts, he labours hard to unite them as much as possible in a mutual affection, and to perfuade them to tolerate each other in those errors and mistakes which they judged each

Rom. xiv. other to be guilty of. Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. Where we may observe, he would not have them to renounce communion with each other for any disputable matters; and that points of controversy ought not by any means to be made the necessary terms of communion. And,

> THAT neither party might rashly judge the errors of those in the opposite opinion to be damnable, or intolerable, he warns them, that they do not, by such a censure of their brethren, usurp upon God's prerogative, and pull down the feverity of his judgment upon

their own heads. Who art thou that judgest Rom. xiv. [and their of line of letters] another's servant? To his town master he standeth or falleth. And again, Why dost thou judge thy brother? or, Why Ver. 10. dost thou set at nought thy brother? We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

IF either party are very confident (as all fides are apt enough to be) that they themfelves see farther than their adversaries, as to the subject of debate, this is no ground for any rigorous behaviour towards those who differ from them in their sentiments. On the contrary, these are our Apostle's rules:

We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities Chap. xv. of the weak, and not to please our selves. But, 1, 2.

Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

As these directions do in general concernevery member in the Christian church, so they were particularly given by this great Apostle to such as were appointed for the ministry. The servant of the Lord must not Tim. strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, ii. 24, 25. patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth. And in another place, A bishop must Tit. i.7. be blameless, as the stewards of God; not self-willed, not soon angry: Holding fast the faith-Ver. 9. ful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort, and to convince the gainsayers.

4. This method is conformable to the practice and example both of Christ and his Apostles. He who made himself a pattern to us in every thing that is wise or good, hath left us a most excellent example in the case before us. When he enter'd upon his ministry, the very first account of his teaching in the Synagogue informs us, that his discourse contain'd this most obliging declaration, That he himself being the person pointed to in that passage of the prophet which he then Luke iv. read, was sent by God, to preach the Gospel 18, 19. to the poor: to heal the broken-hearted: to

Luke iv. read, was sent by God, to preach the Gospel
18, 19. to the poor; to heal the broken-hearted; to
preach deliverance to the captives; and to recover sight to the blind; to set at liberty them
that were bruised; and to preach the acceptVer. 22. able year of the Lord. So that they who

heard him, wonder'd at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

When he rode in great folemnity to Jerusalem, foreseeing, and inwardly grieving at the thought, how unsuccessful that his last effort in preaching there, and exhorting them to repentance, was like to prove, he

Chap. xix. wept most tenderly as he beheld the city, ex
pressing his compassionate concern for them, and the misery which he knew would shortly come upon that wretched people, for neglecting and despising those things which did belong unto their peace.

His most beloved Disciple was of all others the most eminent for that sweet and charitable disposition, by which he converted infinite numbers to the Christian faith.

He

He also was exceedingly beloved by those who followed him, to whom he always applied himself under the endearing character of a father, stiling them constantly his little children.

I MIGHT eafily discover the like affectionate concern in all the rest of the Apostles for the good of those whom they laboured to bring over to the faith of Christ; but for the present I shall take notice only of one more, who was not inferior to any of the Apostles; and who, if we confider him abstracted from the fupernatural affiftances which they all received, was undoubtedly the wifest and most learned of them all; I mean faint Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles: Let us hear his own account of his proceedings, in bringing over proselytes to the truth of Christianity; tis thus he tells us of himself, Though I be 1 Cor. free from all men, yet I have made my felf aix.19,8c. servant unto all, that I might gain the more. Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, that I mightgain them that are without law. To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things unto all men, that I might by all means fave some.

What could be more provoking, than that saying of Festus to him, after he had given a most elegant and rational account of the Christian faith, that too much learn-Acts ing had made him mad? And yet, to this xxvi. 24.

ground-

groundless and slanderous imputation he veActs xxvi. ry calmly answered, I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth
and soberness — And what could be more
likely to prevail with king Agrippa, when he
told this Apostle at the same time, that he
had almost persuaded him to be a Christian,
than that civil and most affectionate, as well

er. 30. as courtly and most polite reply, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these Bonds! Now,

Ir the foregoing arguments were but well considered of; and these precepts and examples drawn out into imitation by us, though it might not perfectly unite us in opinion, of which I see no absolute necessity, yet it would contribute not a little to promote that universal love and charity, that mutual affection and good-will, which is indispensably required by the Gospel, and is indeed the

peculiar glory of our most holy faith.

The effects of mens unjustifiable passions and resentments against their brethren, which arise merely from their difference in opinion, are very lamentable; and yet, perhaps, it would be found, if men would give themselves the trouble cooly and impartially to examine and consider of it, that the things about which they differ are not always so important as they are generally supposed. They are often matters of as little moment, as that famous, but unhappy controversy, about the time of celebrating the festival of Easter, which

which for a long time did so terribly divide the eastern from the western church; and the reconciling of which was in vain attempted by the healing temper of the excellent Irenœus *; whose behaviour in this case, as Eusebius observes upon it, was most agreeable to his name, which fignifies a Peacemaker +, our van doidw steronore saft nads

IT is commonly alledged, by those who pretend the greatest zeal in defending our ecclefiastical constitution. That they who separate themselves from the communion of the national church, as by law established, are generally men of strong prejudices, and weak reason, and that they are misled, or rather wilfully go aftray after their own humour and wanton inclination, without attending to those arguments and reasons on the other fide, which might have brought them to a better understanding of their duty. I hope there are few, if any, so uncharitable in their censures, as to think that this ean universally be true, of all who stand out in a separation from us. But if it may be truly faid of feveral, that they are greatly prejudiced (as no doubt but there are many under great degrees of ignorance and wilful prejudices, as well within as without the church) how are they to be treated in these circumstances? Let those who judge thus of them, fay, whether it be not the likeliest

^{*} Eusebius Eccl. Hift. lib. 5. c. 23. feq.

[†] In vita Conftant. M. lib. 3. c. 5, &c.

way to rectify their judgments, and reclaim them from their errors, to endeavour in a friendly manner to gain some share of their esteem, by a charitable condescension to their infirmities, and then proceed to endeavour their conviction?

THERE is nothing more to be lamented, than that proneness which may too easily be observ'd in many persons, whose discretion is not equal to their zeal, to entertain very unreasonable jealousies and suspicions of such as differ from them in their notions of religion. Those especially who are most warm in religious controversies are too apt to grow intemperate in their zeal against the errors or mistakes of such as they oppose. But surely, every little difference in opinion concerning practical duties, much less therefore in things merely speculative, is not sufficient to justify those harsh reflections too often to be met with in theological disputes. The generality of those who have been much engaged this way will not fatisfy themselves in censuring severely the opinions of their adversaries, but they will presume to judge their hearts, and conclude perverfly, that all they who are so unhappy as to contend for false opinions, must also necessarily be guilty of some depravity in their wills and inclinations too. On the contrary to this,

CHRISTIAN charity requires, that we should make all possible allowances for the weakness of mens understandings; for the prejudices of their education; for the books

and

and studies they have been directed to in their younger days; the conversation they, perhaps, have had for many years with persons of superior parts and learning, who, being sallen into such a way of thinking, as we judge to be very wrong, might have sufficient power with weaker heads to make their sentiments appear true. Upon these, and other considerations of a like nature, it becomes us to judge charitably of their intentions; to compassionate their sailings and mistakes; and, if we think they are material, to study to reclaim them in the spirit of meekness and brotherly affection.

If any man refuseth his assent to any doctrine, in our opinion most evidently true, it becomes us to suppose, that however evident it may seem to us, yet he does not clearly apprehend it; which supposition ought always to incline us patiently to bear with him, and to pity, rather than to revile him. This is the genuine effect of a truly Christian charity: For charity vaunteth not it self, is a Cor.xiii. not puffed up: Doth not behave it self unseem-4, &c.

beareth all things, endureth all things.

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WE must especially take care, that we do not rashly judge that our adversary sees the truth, and yet wilfully resuseth to acknowledge it; for this is most audaciously and presumptuously to judge our neighbour's heart, and is directly opposite to the spirit of charity, one property of which is, that it thinketh no evil.

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THE more we study, and the more we seriously consider the matters of difference between our felves and others, the more we shall discover, if not of truth, yet, at least, of such a plaufible appearance on the oppofite fide, as may justly be supposed to have the face of truth, to those who differ from us in

their notions.

ALL mankind both do, and must, affent to every truth of which they have a very clear perception. If therefore any man refuseth his affent to that which we contend for as a doctrine which is true, we are bound in charity to conclude, that the matter is not equally clear to him: Perhaps he hath not thought sufficiently of the argument by which we are convinced; and it may have made but faint impressions on his judgment, or his memory. All that we can do in such a case, is this, to propose it to him in the clearest and the strongest light that we are able, and to call upon him frequently and feriously to reflect upon it.

How firmly foever we our felves believe the truth of Christianity; and how much foever we hold our felves obliged to stand up in its defence, let us never be unmindful, that we are equally obliged on all occasions to shew our charity and benevolence, even to those who reject and disbelieve it. We may be zealous and fincere, constant and resolute in the profession of this faith, provided we take good heed that we do this always in a first conformity to the first and most im-

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portant principles of that religion which we make profession of, which are the principles of universal love and charity, to all mankind

without exception.

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WE have good reason to judge, that the admonition in the text is not to be restrain'd to the behaviour of Christians in their debates among themselves only; but that the fame conduct was equally to be regarded by them all in their conversation, and disputes even with those also who did not only reject. but vilify the religion they professed; yea, and with them too whose malice was so desperately great against the Christian brethren, as to reproach and persecute them on account of their profession. They were obliged indeed, and frequently exhorted, to hold fast the profession of their faith; and that they should earnestly contend for the faith which Jude, was once delivered to the faints; but this Ver. 3. never could diffolve their obligation to a no less duty, the duty of universal love and charity, which they could not innocently refuse, even to those who did not scruple to oppose themselves with much violence and passion, both against their principles and their persons too. will also flore one clouder

If this was their duty under such trying circumstances, how much more are we obliged to bear with patience the disbelief of this religion in them, who by their peaceable behaviour do not give the least suspicion of any ill designs against our persons, however faulty we may judge them in the point of

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infidelity, for which they are accountable to God only, who alone can judge how far itis owing to negligence, or perverseness, that they do not see the truth. And,

IF it is our duty to live in love and Christian charity with those who are without, who deny the whole of our religion, I should think it could not be disputed but that we ought to cherish in our hearts the most fincere affection for all those who do agree with us in the fundamentals of our faith, tho' they happen to diffent in some particulars from that scheme of principles which we conceive they ought intirely to embrace. We fee too plainly how little regard hath been had to this advice among polemic writers, whom we may observe to contend as eagerly for less material, as for the most substantial matters in religion; nay, they engage more furiously for the bay and stubble which men have laid upon the building, than for that good foundation which Christ himself hath laid.

To conclude, let us never separate those virtues which the Holy Ghost hath recommended in conjunction with each other. Let us never flag in our zeal for those truths which are most necessary to be known and practised; and then especially, let us stand up in their desence when they are most discountenanced: But then, let us contrive to do it always in such a manner as is best adapted to procure the greatest credit both to them and to our selves, in a meek and charitable way, looking up continually to the bright example

to promote Truth and Charity.

example of our bleffed Lord, who, for the better propagation of his Gospel, found it necessary to endure much contradiction of finners against himself, and his religion,

This we shall always find to be the best method of persuasion, the surest way to gain the hearts of those who stand in opposition to us, and win them over to the truth, which the contrary behaviour is not likely to effect; For the wrath of man worketh not the James i righteousness of God.

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DISCOURSE XVIII.

The Folly and Mischief of verbal and trifling Controverses.

1 T I M. vi. 4, 5.

He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about Questions, and stripes of Words, whereof cometh Envy, Strife, Railings, evil Surmisings, perverse Disputings of Men of corrupt Minds, and destitute of the Truth, supposing that Gain is Godliness: From such withdraw thy self.

HE Christian religion had scarce got To any sure sooting in the world before its peace began to be disturbed, not only by Heathens, and other adversaries, but through the violent animosities and dissentions which even then sprung up among its own professors. Whoever reads the New Testa-

Testament with judgment and attention will see plainly, that the greatest part of the epistolary writings were occasioned by, and chiefly calculated for composing these unchristian differences.

SAINT Paul especially speaks frequently, and dwells largely upon this head; it seems to be ever uppermost in his thoughts; and whatever other matters he occasionally treats of, yet he keeps this always in his view, and suffers not his readers to lose the sight of it. His concern was so great for reconciling the affections of Christ's disciples towards each other, that he never misses any opportunity to throw in some good instructions concerning their divisions; he exhorts all parties as much as possible to comply with, or at least to exercise a mutual forbearance towards each other, in the spirit of charity and meekness.

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THIS was the mild and charitable disposition of faint Paul, directly contrary to the inclinations and base designs of one, who, by his intemperate and misguided zeal for things of little moment, would not feruple to diflurb the harmonious concord among Christian brethren, which this Apostle so warmly contended for, and whom he thus describes, He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions, and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmifings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: From Juch withdraw thy felf. Which descriphimsyr

description contains in it these particulars: No many distance out made

country of the emilian year office First, THE small importance of the controversy then on foot, as to the interest of those who kept it up.

Secondly, THE character of the persons who raised and kept up these debates.

Thirdly, THE drifts and defigns of these bos lovers of disputes A elds equal and 107 10

. Fourthly, THE crafty and unfair methods used in carrying on those controaffections of Chrift's disciples vo.series

Fifthly, THE pernicious consequences and + un effects of them. boog smot il words of

ing their divillens; the exhorts all parties as

First, LET us consider the small importance of the controversy then on foot, as to their interest who kept it up. I mean by this, that the things which were most eagerly contended for by the persons here reprefented under fuch an odious character, were in themselves of no real value, and could add very little, if any thing at all, to the happiness or advantage of those on the imposing fide, though they should chance to succeed in flian brethren, which this Anoftle, studit oft

THE matters in debate, to which the Apostle here refers, were, the several rites and ceremonies; the vain and fabulous traditions; the boafted pedigrees from the line of Abraham; and other fuch like frivolous concerns, which many of the Jewish converts most warmly contended for, and descrip-

would

would by all means have imposed upon the faith and practice of their Gentile brethren; who, having never been accustomed to the yoke of Judaism, thought it their duty to maintain their Christian liberty. To patient

THESE differences are sometimes largely treated of, and often hinted at in all the writings of faint Paul, wherein he frequently demonstrates the no-necessity of such observances; their infignificany for promoting virtue and holiness; and their contrariety to the grand defign of Christianity. When he pleads here, ver. 3. for wholfome words; and chap. i. 10. iv. 6. for found and good doctrine, his defign was evidently this, That we ought rather to exert our felves in promoting, and zealously contending for matters of morality. 20 m. a primarinae femora a la de anit

THE fole intention of the Gospel-religion was to reduce men, Jews and Gentiles, to a more perfect knowledge of the one true God; to instruct them how to worship bim in a manner most agreeable to his nature, In John iv. spirit and in truth; to be diligent in their 24. feveral callings; to exercise themselves in the strictest temperance in all their worldly enjoyments; and to attain as much as possible to the utmost purity of heart and affections; to support and advance, as far as in them lies, the good of human fociety; to act with justice and charity towards every fingle member of it, not excepting even the most bitter enemies; to carry themselves towards all mankind with the most benevo-

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lent inclinations, and the most undissembled love.

Thus faint Paul describes the principal aim and scope of Christ's religion in the beginning of this epistle; as he hath done in many other places, too many to repeat.

Chap.i.5. Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unseigned. From this great and good end of Christianity, as he there observes,

Ver. 6. some had swerved and turned aside to vain jangling. This he charges even upon their learned doctors and interpreters of the anti-

Ver. 7. ent law, who, desiring to be teachers of the law, understood neither what they said, nor whereof they did affirm. They insisted much upon the ceremonial part, and the observation of all external ordinances, passing slightly over the moral precepts, which were of a more universal and eternal obligation; and which are the sum and substance both of natural and revealed religion.

THE selfish notions then prevailing among the Jewish zealots were, That no uncircumcised person could be duly qualified for God's favour; that they who were lineally descended from the stock of Abraham, and the patriarchs, were intitled to peculiar privileges in the kingdom of the Messiah; and in these vain fancies they had been long slattered by the lying traditions of their elders.

But,

When mens thoughts and passions are too deeply engaged in a trisling contest about such

fuch things as these, the main duties of religion are very apt to be neglected. The likeliest way to gain attention to these great concerns, is to set aside, if possible, all such frivolous disputes; and if others cannot be persuaded to abstain from contending about such useless matters, it is the part of every wise and good man to pass them by with contempt and disregard. Tis thus that our Apostle here adviseth Timothy, with regard to what was then contended for by those disputers; Neither give heed to fables, and Chap. endless genealogies, which minister questing the same podly edifying which is in faith.

Secondly, WE have here more particularly, the character of the persons who raised and kept up these debates. These men the Apostle had observed to be of a very troublesome and disputations temper; very zealous and busy in propagating their own conceits, and perverting the judgments of the saithful; opposing the wholsome and sound doctrine taught by Christ and his Apostles; and among many others, that in particular, which the Apostle mentioned just before, concerning the duty of servants, as well to their Heathen, as to their Christian masters.

THE particular vicious ingredients here specified, as making up the character of these men, are pride, ignorance, and a delight in verbal controversies. He is proud, knowing nothing,

nothing, but doting about questions and strifes

of words.

1. The first branch of the character here given to those seducers of the Ephesian converts, is pride. The pride of those men was, that they were not satisfied with plain and simple truth as delivered in the Gospel, but having been trained up in the Mosaic rites, and having a great esteem of them, and the traditions of their elders, they could not bear with patience to see them slighted and laid aside, but haughtily strove to impose that yoke upon the necks of others.

WE are often told, that pride puts conceited men upon forging and introducing fects and herefies; and we may fee, by the account of these persons, that the same vice tends as naturally to hold men fast in such opinions as they had once embraced and pub-

lickly maintained. On his work of

Tis too commonly, though very falfly, thought to be a very humbling circumstance in the character of any persons, of scholars more especially, to abandon those notions they have long maintained, and strenuously contended for as veritities of the highest nature; which they have vindicated by word and writing, and this, perhaps, with the reputation of wit and learning too, by which they may have gained much credit, even with persons of a liberal education, and raised in general to themselves a very popular esteem; after all this, frankly and publickly to acknowledge, that their principles were

erroneous, and all their arguments in defence of them fallacious and fophistical, this requires a more than ordinary degree of honethe social production of the bull

fly and resolution.

2. THE next thing noted in their chara-Cter, is, ignorance; knowing nothing, but doting (voowv) fickening or languishing about questions and strifes of words, like some unhealthful persons, whose stomachs and palates are so much vitiated as to despise their proper food, and hanker after such things only as are improper and unwholesome.

I Pur these things together, because the Apostle doth not here speak of absolute ignorance; as if those seducers really knew nothing; but the ignorance he complains of, is, that they misplaced their endeavours after knowledge, in studying and doting about questions and strifes of words --- This was their folly and their fault, that they neglected the true substance of religion, and amused themselves and others with those things which are no other than the mere shadows of it *.

Such as these do oftentimes affect a greater oftentation of their parts and learning, than they who plead for more material things. But faint Paul esteem'd this controversy about ceremonies, words and phrases, not only as a trivial matter, but, which is worse, he tells us, that fuch disputes have a bad influence

^{*} Oi tak oulas attentis M nogen Industiss. Cl. Alex. Strom. 1. 6. fol. 825. Oxon.

upon the practice of moral virtues; and therefore not only in the text he points at the evil tendency of these trisling contests, but in another place he exhorts Timothy, to ii.21,23. follow righteou [nefs, faith, charity, and peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart; but to avoid foolish and unlearned questions, knowing that they do gender Brifes a sound an one of the total and the total and

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2 Tim.

Thirdly, SAINT Paul here intimates the drifts and defigns of these lovers of disputes They are supposed to aim chiefly at the gratification of their pride, humour, or covetousness. This we may infer from the character here given of them; and that not only from what hath been before infifted on, but from the latter part of the verse, where the Apostle saith further, that they were men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth,

supposing that gain is godliness.

IF we see men possessed with a restless itch of disputing for idle ceremonies, and contending more eagerly for subtleties and trifles than for found doctrine, and things which tend to edifying, we may reasonably judge that they hope thereby to gratify their pride and covetousness, by restraining the privileges of church-communion to themselves; and that they are more folicitous to expose and triumph over their adversaries, than to set them right in their opinions; that they study more to advance their own advantage than the glory of God, or the good of men - To BOGU

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contend with fierceness for useless rites, unedifying doctrines, or for ambiguous, unintelligible expressions, tends naturally to give offence, but never to convince any rational and conscientious persons. How shall men be convinced of any errors, but by such arguments as are conceived in plain intelligible terms?

Tis moreover necessary that they, who desire to bring men over to their sentiments, should strive to shew, that they are truths of some importance to be known and credited; and that a generous benevolence for the good of others is the root of all their labours to explain and propagate them. No one is so duly qualified to withdraw men from any errors, either in practice, or opinion, as he, who hath sound out the happy secret of discovering to them in a lively manner, not only their vice, or ignorance, or mistakes, but also his own just and charitable intentions in directing them to the truth.

Fourthly, THE next general observation concerns the crasty and unsair methods used in carrying on those verbal, trisling controversies. This may be gathered from the epithet here given them, perverse disputes. Controversies about words, and matters of no moment, are generally managed, and carried on by a violent and designed wresting of the true sense and plain meaning of the holy Scripture; and which again is contrived, by those who give themselves this liberty, to

pervert and mislead the understandings of illi-

terate and unwary persons.

SUCH disputers labour commonly to perplex things, in themselves plain and intelligible to common understandings, by finding out intricacies, and raising doubts upon some nice, but vain distinctions; and by putting false colours upon some passages and expressions, which otherwise would have

appeared with sufficient clearness.

They endeavour with rhetoric and false philosophy, with a vain pomp and shew of learning, to hide the weakness, and cover the prevarication artfully couched in all their arguments — They contrive by wide, and skilfully contrived digressions to make men lose the fight of what is principally to be consider'd — They turn away the eyes of the readers, as they do the ears of the hearers of a controversy, from the cause to the persons who oppose them; and this they do, by making unnecessary and uncharitable, and for the most part unjust reflections upon their characters.

THESE are the common, and almost constant arts of managing those useless controversies which are started, and supported more especially by those who are very zealous for false
and fabulous traditions, and opinions not
worthy to employ a wise man's thoughts,
for insignificant or unprofitable rites and custooms; and, which is much to be lamented,
too much of this art is frequently employ'd
by such as rise up in the more necessary desenter.

fence of fuch principles as are both true and edifying.

Fifthly, LET us consider now the pernicious consequences and effects of this vain jangling and disputing about questions and strifes of words; all which the Apostle hath sum'd up also in the text; envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, and a perplexing of the truth.

IT is not to be wonder'd at, that the fuecess gained by either side should create abundance of envy and rancour one against another in the feveral parties thus at variance; the natural consequence of which is this, that these ill-natured passions being once stirr'd up, will seldom fail to instigate each party to lessen, as much as possible, the reputation of their adversaries; and if they find no just and proper handle to discredit their opponents, they will, however, betake themselves to railing and reviling: This is always most visible in the worst cause, and weakest advocates. These unchristian methods must needs occasion many jealousies and evil surmisings on all fides.

THERE is one other very material observation suggested by the Apostle, viz. That these perverse disputes about questions and strifes of words, instead of clearing up the matters in debate, do, in consequence of such proceedings, render the truth it self more

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unintelligible and perplex'd; for he tells us plainly, that even the disputants themselves are destitute of the truth; or perhaps, as the 'Aweseen- Greek word feems to intimate, they are judicially deprived of it: And one may very well fuppose, that heedless and injudicious persons will be led away after them into errors and mistakes.

> WHEN much dust is raised in a foolish warm controversy, it would be strange if some mens eyes are not blinded with it. In fuch a mist of doubtful disputations, about questions and strifes of words, 'tis hardly possible but some of those who chance to be surrounded with it, will deviate from the path in which they ought to walk.

HAVING now laid down and confidered the feveral observations of our wise and learned Apostle, concerning the springs and causes, the drifts and defigns, of those haughty and conceited, those ignorantly zealous persons, who maintain crafty and hot disputes about matters of little moment or concern to religion; and shewn the evil consequences and effects which naturally, and almost unavoidably flow from them; having done this, I must not forget the application made by him in the same place, From such withdraw thy felf; and of which the evangelist is called upon, in the next epistle, to put the Ephefian Christians in remembrance, Charging them before the Lord, that they strive not about

2 Tim. ii. 14.

about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. To the same purpose he wrote to Titus also, telling him, This is a faith-Tit. iii. 8, ful saying, and these things I will that thou? affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works: These things are good and profitable unto men. But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. And,

What more necessary caution can be given, what more useful doctrine preached, than that which teaches men to regard the main substance of religion; to exercise themselves in good works, and such things as naturally conduce to the interest and advantage of mankind; and by which, instead of puzzling their brains with intricate and unprofitable disputes, they may grow wifer, and better, and happier both here, and hereafter for ever in a better life.

This advice, as far as we can judge, was offered alike to all Christians, whatsoever their learning or capacities might have been: It cannot therefore in the least be questioned, but it was more particularly necessary for the ignorant and unlearned. 'Tis great rashness for such as these to wade out of their depth, by entering into disputes and controversies about things of no concern, either to their present or future happiness, especially about such matters as are not capable of being

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made easy and intelligible to them, when they have used their best endeavours to com-

prehend them throughly.

It is an unpardonable presumption in those who have not been educated in the learned languages, to amuse themselves about questions and strifes of words; or to give ear to such persons as make it their business to seduce them from their duty by these deceitful arts.

Every plain man, of ordinary education, parts and judgment, may eafily apprehend what are the main foundation principles of Christian duty, which our Lord hath told him, is, To love the Lord his God with all his heart and foul, and his neighbour as himself; that is, with a cordial and fincere affection; and that he should be always willing to do unto others, as he could reasonably expect they, in the like circumstances, should do unto him. He may also know, that it is the duty of every Christian, to promote, as much as possible, peace, and love, and unity in the world; and that these things are most likely to be attained by a modest and humble submission to such guides and governors as providence hath fet over him.

If a man be once persuaded of his duty in cases so plain and practical as these are, why should be suffer himself to be perplexed with abstructe questions and debates which may possibly be laid before him by artful

men,

men, to disturb his quiet, or pervert him from his duty, even in these plain cases? Why should he listen to any crasty disputants, who, for ought he knows, may involve him in the guilt of some unwarrantable

practifes?

I SPEAK not this to discourage any one from a rational and modest inquiry into the grounds and principles of his faith, according to the opportunities and capacities which God hath given him; let him learn as much of this as he can possibly attain to, that he may be ready always to give an an-1 Pet. iii. fiver to every one that asketh him a reason of 15. the hope that is in him. Let him consult with diligence and impartiality the holy Scripture; let him consider more especially the fermons and discourses of the blessed Jesus, as he finds them plainly and faithfully recorded in the four Gospels; let him attend to the natural dictates of his own reason; let him compare with them the divine precepts and commands of Christ; and when he perceives, as I believe he will feldom fail to do, that they all speak the fame language to his conscience, and that the laws of Christ are the laws of reason too; that the injunctions of the Gospel are fuch, as his own judgment, when free from prejudice and carnal passions, must approve of, I make no question but after fuch inquiries, made with diligence and fincerity of heart, all the great lines of ChriChristian duty will appear plain before his face.

IF after all these honest pains and careful fearches, any scruples yet remain, though it is not likely that they should, there are many learned persons, ministers, and others too, whom he may confult for his better information; from whose endeavours, if he meet not with that perfect fatisfaction he defires, he may suspend his judgment till God is pleased, if it be his pleasure, by some other methods, to make a clearer discovery of his will to him, in the thing concerning which he hefitates at present; in the mean time he may rest fully satisfied with this assurance, that he shall never be accountable for what he cannot possibly underfland.

THE Apostle hath observed how unprositably the disputes about religion were managed in his days, as appears from the text,
and this discourse upon it; and I must
needs say, the matter is far from being
alter'd for the better since that time; for
instead of minding with a due regard the
apostolical admonitions, to pursue with all
vigor those wholesome and sound dostrines,
and to propagate as much as possible those
principles which have a natural tendency
to make men better, and happier, the succeeding ages have grown continually worse
and worse in vexing one another, and

troubling the world with questions and strifes of words.

As for the present time it may easily be seen, that we have gain'd but little wisdom by looking back upon the follies and miscarriages of former ages; this, I doubt, is full as bad, if it be not more guilty in that particular, than any age since the

preaching of the Gospel.

THE world is now, and long hath been, at this pass, by our too frequent and peevish disceptations about the modes and circumstances of religion, that the most vital and essential parts of it seem to be forgotten. Nay, so violent is our fondness grown for these frivolous and trifling matters, for fome certain words and phrases, and fuch vague obscure terms of art as have not any known and determinate meaning affix'd to them, that if any man has the courage to plead for what is more folid and fundamental in religion, in oppofition to these questions and strifes of words, 'tis very difficult for him to escape the cenfure and reprehension of these sierce contenders for mere shadows and circumstantials, or vain philosophy.

WHOEVER seriously contemplates the state of our present controversies, either in civil or ecclesiastical affairs, by which the people are distracted, and divided one against another, will find that the dispute turns chiefly upon words of a very doubtful significa-

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tion;

The Folly and Mischief, &c.

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tion; at least they become doubtful in their meaning, as they are managed by those who strive to impose upon mens consciences, like the Judaizers in the Apostle's days, such usages and principles as have not any direct and immediate influence upon the lives and manners of private persons, or the safety and welfare of the community in general.

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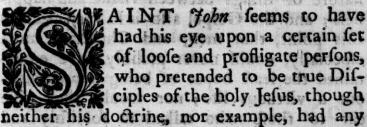
DISCOURSE XIX.

The indifpensable Necessity of Righteousness in order to Salvation.

milions were, even to commit

I JOHN iii. 7,

Little Children, let no Man deceive you: He that doth Righteousness, is righteous, even as he is righteous.



neither his doctrine, nor example, had any influence upon their lives. Before the death of this Apostle there appeared, among the Asiatic Christians, some leud heretical teachers, derived from Simon Magus, Menander,

Cerin-

Cerintbus, and other such like authors, of several impure and antichristian doctrines, who endeavoured to persuade themselves and others, that they might obtain the blessings promised in the Gospel, without the practice of all the virtues and holy precepts there in-

joined*.

They who first contrived those false and foolish, and very dangerous opinions, had, no doubt, at that time instilled them into many others; and many more, the Apostle readily foresaw, would very probably be seduced by their deceitful arts. Many thoughtless and unwary persons might thus be very easily insnared. How odd, or contradictory soever those notions were, even to common sense, as well as to the whole tenor of the Gospel, yet being very favourable to the vices and prejudices then reigning among many Christians, they would, on that account, be very readily embraced.

THERE is such a close connection in the nature of things between virtue and happiness; and the Gospel also is so very clear in this point, that men, and Christians more especially, could never possibly have entertained the least hopes of being happy without a virtuous life; nor would they give ear to those who talked so foolishly and wickedly, if they were not bribed to come into that scheme by a too great fondness

J. Martyr, Apol. 1. Sect. 34. Iren. l. 1. cap. 20, 21.

for their finful passions; but having a defire to indulge their carnal inclinations, and at the same time desiring the natural rewards of virtue, and coveting the joys and blessings promised in the Gospel, they would be apt to swallow, with much greediness, those principles by which it was pretended their sinful pleasures might well enough be reconciled with their present and suture happiness.

AGAINST the delusion of such a fatal error the declaration in the text was then a seasonable and very proper caveat. And while there are great numbers who still continue under the same, or the like dangerous mistakes, it will be always very useful, and highly necessary to explain, and consider well the sense and certainty of this aphorism, He that doth righteousness, is righteous.

OF this truth the venerable Apostle, as a tender father, careful of their safety, in a very courteous and endearing stile, admonishes the Christians in those days, Little children, let no man deceive you: He that doth righteousness, is righteous.

My defign is,

first, To state the true notion of Christian righteousness by this maxim, He that doth righteousness, is righteous.

Secondly, To examine the several methods by which many have, and still do suffer themthemselves to be deceived, in taking that for righteousness which is not righteoufnefs. The Mandable of the

Thirdly, To apply the Apostle's exhortation, in perfuading you not by any means to be deceived in a matter of fo great concern to your falvation.

First, I SHALL endeavour to state the true notion of Christian righteousness, by explaining what is here meant by doing righte-Walketeadh neachtaraigh

BEFORE I come to the more direct and immediate proofs of this matter, it will not be improper to remark, That to be righteous, in this place, is the fame as to be justified; which is a term relating more particularly to the courts of judicature, where the guilt, or innocence, of those who are accused and tried, is determined by the law, and the sentence of the judge: As that pronounces, either in their favour, or against them, they must either suffer the penalty of their disobedience, or be admitted to the privileges allotted by that law to those who have kept close to the rules and precepts of it, in all those things which are strictly and peremptorily required, and where the duty is not otherwife dispensed with, or their failings pardoned, by express provisions in the law it felf.

THE holy Gospel is the law by which all Christians know they must be tried; and there there is no doubt but that they all defire to be found righteous; that is, to be justified or acquitted, when they appear before the judge to receive their final fentence. This, I say, is their defire; but certainly they can have no rational hopes of this, unless they shall be found obedient to the law, by which the righteous judge will then determine of their case.

Upon what foot we may reasonably expect to be declared righteous, or to be justified as righteous persons, and acquitted by the sentence of the lawgiver, and, in consequence of that, be admitted to the privileges and blessings promised to those who shall observe and regulate their behaviour according to that law, saint John hath here informed us, by telling us, He that doth righteousness, is righteous.

HE makes frequent mention in this epistle of the honour and happiness, the mighty
blessings and advantages attainable by Christians; and by means of that holy covenant
with God, into which they are enter'd thro'
Jesus Christ, who by his life and actions Chap.
hath manifested the way to eternal life, i. 2.
and given us the certain promise of it Chap.
And,

HAVING said thus much in the two first chapters, he begins this chapter with a rapturous admiration of God's amazing condescension in his love to Christ's Disciples; and by this exciting them to consider, and with Ver. 1.

joy and gratitude to reflect upon it, Behold, fays he, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the fons of God! And.

Being thus adopted into fuch an honourable relation, he affures us farther, that, in consequence of that adoption, we shall hereafter be admitted into the divine presence, where we shall have a more distinct and perfect knowledge of his nature, and, by the influence of that happy vision, improve our fouls into a more near resemblance of the Deity, We shall be like bim, for we shall see bim as be is.

Such a glorious prospect of blis and immortality is very apt to inspire all professors of Christ's religion with very eager, though oft-times ungrounded hopes. We may perceive, by what St. John hath told us, and by our own common observations, that even wilful finners are very forward to put in their claims to fuch a rich inheritance, however slender, infignificant, and false their title will be found, upon a strict examination.

To discourage, as much as possible, such claimants, the Apostle tells us plainly, and repeats it often, in a great variety of expressions, upon what conditions only we can justly hope to be admitted. To obtain eternal life, we must be in fellowship with God and Christ. But God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fels

Chap. i.

Ver. 5. Ver. 6. fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we

lie, and do not the truth.

DARKNESS is here a metaphor for fin, as light is for truth and holiness; and 'tis fully so explained by what follows, If we walk in Ver. 7. light, as he is light - the Blood of Jefus Christ bis Son cleanseth us from all fin. All. hopes of coming to the fight and knowledge of God, without righteousness, are vain and fruitless; for bereby only do we know that we Chap. ii. know bim, if we keep bis commandments.3. Again, he fays, If any man love the world, Ver. 15, the love of the Father is not in him. For all 16. that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, i. e. the immoderate defire of pleasure, wealth, and glory, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

From whence it evidently appears, that all manner of finful lusts and inclinations, while they are indulged and persisted in, are directly opposite to our Christian hopes of being happy in the divine love: Every Chap. iii. man that bath this hope in him, purifieth 3-himself, even as he is pure. He that commit. Ver. 8. teth sin, is of the devil, says he; and, For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil: That he might free us from the guilt and dominion of them here, as well as from the punishment of them hereafter. His design was, so effectually to rescue us from the slavery of fin, that it might no longer reign

in our mortal bodies; that in all those who are his Disciples there might be no wilful or habitual fin, as there was in him no fin Ver. 5, 6. at all; and that whofoever abideth in him should not fin, i.e. habitually and finally; for he that finneth, or liveth in fin, bath not. that is to fay, hath not, to any good end or purpose, either seen, or known him; upon

which he therefore adds immediately, Let no man deceive you: He that doth nighteousness,

is righteous.

So that from the context of the place before us, and the many repetitions of the fame thing throughout this whole epiftle, nothing can be clearer, than that by doing righteousnes, he means nothing less than purity and integrity of life and manners; a constant actual performance of our whole duty, according to the holy institutions of our Lord, and the pattern he hath given us in his life on earth. As Christ was righteous, by a holy and righteous life, we also, in like manner, and in conformity to his example, ought to make proof of our righteoufness, by avoiding fin, and persisting stedfastly in a virtuous and righteous course of life.

This constant regular proceeding in the works of righteousness, is the doing righteousness; and it stands in direct opposition to every finful act. 'Tis the only true distinction between the children of God and the Ver. 10. children of the devil. He only who doth

righte-

righteousness is the regenerate person, who is born of God; and of whom he faith, that he overcomes the world: He hath obtained so Chap, iv, far the superiority over all his carnal appe-4tites, and even over all things temporal, whether they are the troubles, or the pofferfions and enjoyments of this present life, that notwithstanding any opposition they may give him, he can cheerfully perfift in a filial obedience to his heavenly Father; so that his commandments are no way grievous to him; his resolutions of obedience are more prevalent, and his sense of duty more powerful with him, than either the delights, or terrors of this mortal life. However strong the temptations to the contrary may be, they can't fo far prevail over him, as to compel him to deliver up his foul a flave to fin. In all the moral actions which lie before him for his choice, the mind being free from ignorance and furprize, he is always righteous, and doth righteoufness.

It is a very great absurdity for any man to hope that he may possibly reconcile either pagan libertinism, or fewish superstition, with Christian happiness; or to presume that the servants of sin and Satan may have their portion with the children of God; that they who walk in darkness all their lives, shall, notwithstanding that, be meet partakers of the inheritance of the saints in

light.

SAINT John hath plainly described, by certain known characters, the children of God, and the children of the devil, and difcovered to us the most clear and visible marks by which they are to be distinguished the one from the other; and by which it may be known, with great certainty, whether their condition be fafe or perilous. They cannot possibly be mistaken, if they will judge themfelves impartially by this rule; if they act wickedly, and wilfully perfift in it, they are the children of the devil, and shall have their portion with the damned: If they act righteously, and persevere in well-doing, they shall be justified before God, and have their lot among the faints.

ken of the safety of our salvation; nay, 'tis the only certain evidence we can have of it. God is a righteous judge; and we may depend upon it, he will always act conformably to this character. The judgment of God is according to truth: The righteous Lord loveth righteousness. This judgment is committed to Jesus Christ, who ever was, and ever will be found, in all things perfectly obedient and conformable to his Father's will. He cannot therefore justify a transgressor of the law, and declare that man to be innocent whom he knows to be an obstinate offender; or

pronounce him guiltless who hath broken

THE doing righteousness is the surest to-

the law by which he must be tried.

Rom, ii. 2. Pfal.

xi. 7.

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SAINT Paul hath plainly told us beforehand, that, Not the bearers of the law are Rom. ii. just before God, but the doers of the law shall 13. be justified. He therefore who hath not fulfill'd the law of Christ, by which he shall be tried, cannot hope to be acquitted by the judge and lawgiver, but on the contrary hath just cause to fear, that he shall be condemned by that law. Know ye not, says the same i Cor. Apostle, that the unrighteous shall not inherit vi. 9,10. the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inberit the kingdom of God. Again he tells us, to the same purpose, The Gospel of Christ is Rom i. the power of God unto Salvation, for therein 16, 17. is the righteousness of God revealed, i.e. it is there set forth, in such a manner, as to leave no rational ground of hope for those who do not follow after righteousness. And if we can doubt whether this be the true sense of that expression, the words that follow in the next verse are sufficient to convince us of it. For the wrath of God is revealed from bea- Ver. 18. ven, against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

In the discourse which saint Peter had with Cornelius the centurion, he says, for the encouragement of that honest-hearted soldier, Now I perceive that God is no respecter Acts x.

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of 34, 35.

of persons: But in every nation, be that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. In which we have the certain mark of one who is in a state of favour and acceptance with Almighty God, in the terms of the text; and which imply, that the person so described is one, who, being perfuaded of the being and providence of God, and that he is accountable to him for his behaviour, conducts his life by the rules of moral honesty and virtue, acting always in conformity to the divine will, as discovered by the light of nature only, where he hath no other guide to direct him in his way: And the words, by which the rectitude of fuch a person's manners are described, are equivalent to the doing righteousness in the place before us. Now.

IF even in the state of nature men were obliged not only to believe and sear God, but also to perform all the acts of moral righteousness, and, by uniformly persevering in them, to render their conduct acceptable to the Deity; shall a Christian be accepted, who falls short of this, when it is expected of him that he should do more than

Matt. v. ed of him that he should do more than

EVERY wilful, and deliberate act of fin, is inconsistent with the integrity of Christian John iii righteousness. Whosever is born of God, doth not commit fin; for his seed remaineth in him: And he cannot fin, because he is born of God.

God. A wilful finner, and a child of God, are terms fo extremely incoherent and contradictory, that they can never possibly belong to one and the same person at one and the same time: And though he doth not sin without some great reluctance, and much debating with himself, between his vicious appetites, and the obligations he is under to refift them, he cannot be truly faid, at fuch a time, to do righteousness, and consequently must have lost his title to the rewards of righteoufness; he hath by that act excluded himfelf for the present from any title to the promised inheritance; but yet, if he repents him truly of his fault, returns to his duty, and perseveres in his obedience, he may rationally hope for pardon, through the mercies of the Christian covenant; for, in this case, saint John affures us, We bave Chap. an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ ii. 1, 2. the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our fins.

THESE are indeed the confolations of the bleffed Gospel: But even here, we see, the offender cannot hope to be restored to God's favour, unless he doth repent and turn from the error of his ways, and continue thenceforward in a faithful obedience to the divine

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In a word, all the Apostles and Disciples of our Lord are unanimous, and very clear in this point, That without a holy and virtuous life we can have no affurance of falva-S'UO

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tion.

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tion. Thus, in the epiffle to the Hebrews, Heb. xii. we are told expresly, that without boliness no man shall see the Lord. To be filled with the fruits of righteousness, is the only proof faint Paul expected should be given by the Philippians, that they were fincere and without Phil. i. 10, 11. offence. And faint Peter judged this as abfolutely necessary to a joyful appearance in the great day of the Lord, that we have 2 Pet. iii. employed our lives in all boly conversation and godliness. This, they tell us, was the Tim. i. chief design of publishing the Gospel. The end of the commandment is charity, out of a 5. pure beart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned. The grace of God that Titus ii. 11, 12. bringeth Salvation bath appeared unto all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteoufly, and godly in this present world:

THE truth of what I have so largely pleaded for upon this head is so exceeding clear, as well from the reason of the thing it self, as from what we find in Scripture concerning it, that it would be altogether needless to dwell so long upon it, if it were not, on the other hand, as manifest, that it is very little practically considered, there being a strange proneness in mankind to put a cheat upon themselves, or at least to suffer themselves too easily to be deceived in this matter.

trees his we can have no effurance of falva.

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Our Lord hath so plainly and fully declared his mind, both negatively and positively upon this subject, that barely but to mention what he saith upon it, would be to recapitulate the main substance of his discourses, sermons, parables, and all occasional conversations between himself and his Disciples, as well as those he had with the Scribes and Pharisees, and other adversaries of him and his doctrine. Let the holy records be consulted in this matter.

He denies, in plainest terms, that any wilful sinner can be judged righteous; or, that he can be justly stiled a servant of righteousness. He that committed sin, is the John viii, servant of sin. And I suppose no man will 34 contend that while a person is thus under the dominion of sin, he can be justified before God, or be accounted righteous in his sight.

The instructions given by him to his Apostles, for admitting men into the Christian church by baptism, were, That they Matt. should teach their proselytes to observe xxviii all things whatsoever he had commanded them; which must imply, without controversy, the observation of all moral virtues, of that eternal and universal law, which he had said before, He came not to destroy, but Chap. v. to fulfil.

'Tis allowed by all, that in the fifth chapter of faint Matthew, after he had enume-A a 4 rated, rated, and recommended many excellent virtues to be peculiarly observed by his disciples; and adding thereupon, that he came not to destroy, but to fulfil the law and the prophets, he meant the whole body of the moral law; and that he would not by any means dispense with the wilful breach of any one of them.

Matt. v. 19.

THIS is plain enough from what he faith immediately upon it, Whospever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men fo, he shall be called least in the kingdom of beaven. Which is the same as if it had been said, he that wilfully and presumptuously transgresseth any one precept of the moral law, how little or inconfiderable foever it may appear to him, and shall dare to encourage the like transgression, shall not have any part in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of beaven. He who practifes all fuch duties, and teaches others the necessity of a strict and punctual observance of them, hath the best and surest title to Christianity, and the happiness attending the fincere profession of it.

LET it therefore be most carefully confidered, and always well remembered, that we are very frequently and plainly told, That God will judge every man according to bis works—— That for this purpose we shall be cited before the judgment-seat

Righteousness in order to Salvation.

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of Christ —— and that it is upon this foundation only, that Christ will then pronounce the final sentence —— That as the workers of iniquity shall go away into everlasting punishment; so the righteous, or they only who do righteousness, shall enter into life eternal.

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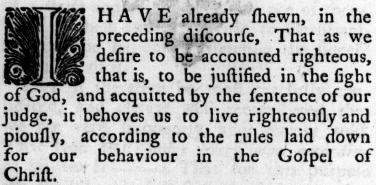


DISCOURSE XX.

The indispensable Necessity of Righteousness in order to Salvation.

I JOHN iii. 7.

Little Children, let no Man deceive you: He that doth Righteousness, is righteous, even as he is righteous.



IT hath been evidently proved, from the context of the place, and the general phraseology

ology of this epiftle, and other writings of the same Apostle, as also from the other sacred penmen, and the declarations of our Lord himself, That by doing righteousness is meant an uniform uninterrupted course of virtue, and obedience to the laws of Christ. And in the progress of this argument I have prov'd, That whofoever takes the liberty to fin wilfully and deliberately stands condemned by this rule; and that he cannot then rely with any manner of affurance on the divine favour, or hope for that falvation which Christ hath purchased for us; and in this desperate condition he must still remain, until he be restored by a fincere repentance, and a future faithful perfeverance in his duty. And thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteourness, if we expect to be justified and found righteous when we stand upon our trial before the righteous judge. I come now,

Secondly, To examine the methods by which many have, and still do suffer themfelves to be deceived, in taking that for righteousness which is not righteousness.

Tis hardly possible to conceive, that any man, in any measure capable of thought and reason, can be so weak, as to think in earness he can be righteous, unless he doth righteousness. How then comes it to pass, that notwithstanding this, men are so apt to fall into such an error, as to presume that they

they may be accounted righteous before God; or juffified and accepted, without a life of

righteoulnels?

THE mistake, I think, is either from an utter disbelief of what hath been so fully proved before, viz. That actual righteoufness is absolutely necessary to our justification; or otherwise they must entertain some wrong ideas concerning righteousness: They must take up with false, or partial notions of it; they do either judge something to be righteousness which is very different in its nature from it, and in which it doth not in the least confist; or else they do conceive, that the observance of some parts or branches of it may stand in stead of all the rest, and be fufficient of themselves to denominate them righteous. pelipostalit lis la

IT is, perhaps, no very easy matter to enumerate all the fereral ways in particular by which men have been imposed upon, or which they may have thought of, to deceive themselves, and to delude their consciences in the matter of falvation. Many devices have been fought out, to preferve and cherish in their hearts the hopes and expectations of a happy immortality, and to make them feem confishent with some vices they are loth to part with; and to shift off the obligation to an uniform obedience, and constant perseverance in holiness and virtue. Now ore norm sind polled the are won

ALTHOUGH I dare not presume to say, that I can either speak, or think of all the various methods of delusion in this case, yet if I have well explained, and confirmed the notion of doing righteousness, and from thence demonstrated, That integrity of life and manners is absolutely required by the Christian covenant, it is sufficient of it self to answer all evasions to the contrary, be

they what they will. However,

I SHALL take notice of a few of them; fuch as are most notorious and very general, and under which 'tis very probable all the rest may in some fort be comprehended; or in considering these particulars the vanity of all others may sufficiently appear. If we can perceive the vanity and fallacy of such as I shall mention, and are convinced how inessectual any, or all of them must needs be to secure our salvation, without the doing righteousness, in the sense before explained, other impostures of a like nature may very readily be discovered by us.

1. ONE thing which formerly in this, as well as in several other, if not in all Protestant countries, did very much prevail, to the deceiving of the generality of Christian people, and by which too many have, and still do continue to deceive themselves and others, is, a notion that faith alone, without the works of righteousness, is sufficient for the justification of a Christian. I shall therefore now shew, in consutation of this opinion, that

that faith, without a holy and virtuous life, will be unavailable to falvation. And I shall now forbear all manner of appeals to human reason in this case, though nothing can be plainer, in the eye of reason, than this plain truth, That without a life of righteousness a man can never justly be accounted righteous, let his faith be what it will. But since they, who are apt to be missed by the contrary persuasion, say many things to the disparagement of human reason, I shall fetch the strength of all the arguments I make use of, in consuting this opinion, from what the

Scripture fays concerning it.

THE chief handle for this most absurd and gross misrepesentation of the Christian doctrine, hath undoubtedly been taken from fome difficult and obscure passages in saint Paul's epistles; but surely he could never have been thus wretchedly misunderstood, if the main drift of his discourses had been carefully attended to: It would then evidently appear, that they are not the works of Christian righteousness which he speaks so lightly of, but either the imperfect morals of the Heathens, or the ceremonious performances prescribed by the law of Moses; and 'tis plain enough, that the works of this latter fort were what he chiefly had his eye upon, as ineffectual to falvation without the faith of Christ, and in consequence of that, the observation of his most holy and righteous laws; for when he lays so great a stress on faith, he means no less

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less by that word than the whole of our religion, as well the practical as the speculative part; nay, principally what relates to practice.

Not one of Christ's Disciples urges the necessity of moral virtues with greater earnessness than he, declaring peremptorily, That without boliness no man shall see the Heb. xii. Lord. And, That the wrath of God is re-14. wealed from beaven, against all ungodliness, 18. and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. The faith he speaks of, he hath told us plainly, is the faith that Gal. v. works by love, and is more available to salva-6. tion than either circumcision or uncircumci-Chap. sion, i. e. than either the righteousness of vi. 15- Jews or Heathens; and the same thing, with a very little variation, is again afferted in the next chapter.

AFTER arguing strenuously against the efficacy of works without faith, he explains himself in the clearest terms, that by works he there means the observation of the ceremonial law. Therefore we conclude, says he, Rom. iii, that a man is justified by faith, without the 28. deeds of the law. And, lest they should suspect that he spake thus in derogation of any of those moral duties which the law enjoined, he adds surther, Do we then make woid the law through faith? God forbid: Yea, we establish the law. We are so far, saith he, from setting those aside, that, by the preaching of the faith of Christ, we do ra-

tify and confirm the obligations men are un-

der to all the duties of morality.

LOVE is the most general and commanding principle in the Christian scheme. And in what exalted strains doth he speak of the effect of that; and particularly in the comparison and distinction of it to faith!

1 Cor.xiii. Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am

nothing.

Among the many excellent instructions. Tit. iii. 8. which he gives to Titus, he tells him, This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works: These things are good and prositable unto men.

In like manner also, Peter warns all Christians, not to trust to the mere belief, or assent of the mind to the truths of Christians.

2 Pet. i. anity, but that, Giving all diligence, they 5,6,7,8 should take care to add to their faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity; intimating plainly, that without these things, they would be altogether barren, or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. So that according to him, the faith and knowledge of Christ, and of his doctrines, without the works of righteousness and charity, would be wholly useless and insignificant.

IF any of faint Paul's expressions upon this subject are hard to be understood by the un-

learned,

learned, and on that account more liable to be misconstrued, saint James hath taken care to set it in the clearest light, by speaking fully, and very plainly to the purpose, What Jam. ii. doth it prosit, my brethren, though a man say 14 be bath faith, and bath not works? Can faith save him? —— And again, Faith, if it hath Ver. 17, not works, is dead, being alone —— Thou be-19 lievest that there is one God; Thou dost well; saith he, The devils also believe, and tremble.

- 2. Another vain opinion which feveral persons have unwarily taken up, to evade the absolute necessity of good works, is, That God hath predestinated, elected, and ordained a certain number of particular perfons to eternal life, without any previous confideration had to their behaviour; and this, no doubt, hath encouraged some to a bold presumptuous confidence of their own fafety, as judging themselves to be of that number, notwithstanding the many errors, and wilful fins, which they themselves cannot choose but be very conscious of. This also is a very great and dangerous mistake, and contrary to the nature and infinite perfections of the divine Being, representing him as very arbitrary and partial in his dealings with his creatures. It is a flat contradiction also to the whole tenor of the Scripture, which hath told us in express words, That God will have all men to be I Tim. saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the ". 4. . B b truth.

Deut. iv. THE whole nation of the Yews, in the old Testament, are often stiled the chosen, 6, 7, 8. or elect of God; and all the feed of Abrabam his chosen people. And the like expressions we have concerning all Chri-

1 Pet. ii. stians in general. We are a chosen genera-9. tion, a royal priestbood, an boly nation, a peculiar people. So that unless it can be faid, that all who were derived from the flock of Abraham according to the flesh, and all who ever were admitted into the Christian churches, which had been fcattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, and Bithynia, to whom faint Peter writes, and whom he calls elect, without distinction, shall be faved, it is to no purpose to argue thus from such exfone to ciernal life, without any or anol

THAT this could not possibly be the judgment of the facred writers, I might thew from innumerable paffages, which would be tedious in this place: I shall only mention an exhortation of faint Peter to those whom he had stiled elect more than once, which proves that he thought, notwithstanding such election as he spake of, they might, by their neglect of Christian duties, come short of the salvation which they hoped for; he therefore calls upon them to fecure it by a righteous and holy life: Wherefore the ra-

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ther, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election fure.

3. In consequence of this supposed arbitrary election, this fort of persons have been deceived

deceived into another false and dangerous opinion, That Christ died for them, and them only; and that however they might fail in the regular practice of a virtuous and godly life, all their miscarriages shall be atoned for by the imputation of his righteoufness to them; and that his perfect obedience to the will of God will answer for all their wilful transgressions of the divine laws. But, as Christ being made perfect is indeed Heb. v. the author of eternal salvation, yet he is so 9. only, as it follows, unto all them that obey bim; and unless we are found obedient unto his laws our condition will be very desperate: For when he shall be revealed from beaven 2 Thef. i. with his mighty angels, he will take venge-7, 8, 9. ance, not only on them that know not God. but on all them also that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

4. ANOTHER vain presumption which some hope will supersede the necessity of good works, is, by holding a strict communion with that society of Christians which they judge, perhaps, to be the only true church; or, at least, the purest, and most conformable to original Christianity, both in its doctrines, and in its forms and modes of

worthip.

To which I need fay no more than this, That if that church, of which they glory to be members, injoins the absolute necessity of

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good works, then, by the judgment of their own communion, they cannot hope to be faved without them; if it teaches otherwise, 'tis no true church, and their adherence to it cannot fave them.

5. Too many, I am afraid, are apt to perfuade themselves, That the bare profession of Christianity, together with the observance of some external ordinances, will be sufficient for falvation.

Bur this, if possible, is a more deceitful

and weak pretence than any of the former. Let us hear the words of Christ himself upon this argument: He compares this vain professor to a tree, which makes a fair appearance in leaves and branches, but failing of fruit, the only end of planting it, is devoted to destruction; Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is bewn down and cast into the fire. By which comparison he tells us with fufficient clearness, that every man who brings not forth good fruits, by doing righteousness, will be given to destruction -And if 'tis possible to mistake his meaning in that fimilitude, he repeats the fense of it Ver. 21. immediately in the plainest terms, Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of beaven: But he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. It is not calling upon his name, or

the outward profession of his religion, that will carry a man to heaven; but the performance of God's will, in keep-

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THAT he might not leave the least shadow of hope to any fuch pretenders, he affures us, That at the day of judgment he will reject the plea of those, who, without a life of righteousness, had believed, and taught and preached up his religion, and had fuch confidence in the power of his name, as to perform wonders by it; even of fuch as these he tells us, I will profess unto them, I Matt. vii. never knew you: Depart from me ye that work 22, 23. iniquity. The same doctrine he continues to Ver. 24, enforce upon his hearers, by other compari-&c. fons which follow in the fame place, to shew how vain a thing it is, to build our hopes of eternal happiness on any other foundation but that of virtue only.

THE Jewish religion consisted more in external ordinances than the Christian doth; and those outward observances were the very things which served to distinguish them from all other nations upon earth; and yet Christ and his Apostles have taught us how unavailable those things were, even to them, with-

out the practice of moral virtues.

Our Lord reproved the Pharisees, for tith-Chap. ing mint, and annise, and cummin, and omiting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, &c. And saint Paul affirms, Rom. ii. that he is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; 28, 29. neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the sless: But he is a Jew, who is one inwardly;

wardly; and circumcisson is that of the heart. How much less therefore can he be said to be a Christian, who, neglecting moral duties, hath regard only to outward ordinances? The Christian religion is more spiritual; and therefore if matters of morality were the weightiest things in the occonomy of the Jewish religion, much more are they so to be accounted in the Christian.

6. There is not, I believe, any kind of fallacy by which more men have been deceived, than by trufting to a partial and imperfect

course of righteousness. But,

As it is absolutely necessary to exercise our selves in some good works, so it is also required that we practise, as we happen to be called to it, all the virtues of Christianity; and therefore we do but miserably deceive our selves, if we think to be accepted by observing the laws and precepts of our Lord in part only; or by hoping to commute for the contempt, or neglect of some of them, by a more exact and diligent observation of the rest. On the contrary, our Lord's command is this,

Matt. v. Be ye perfett, even as your Father which is in 48. heaven is perfett. And faint James tells us, Jam. ii. Whosever shall keep the whole low, and yet

offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

In the text also saint John hath said enough to caution Christians against this grand mistake; for if we would, as we are here exhorted, conform our selves to the life of Christ, we must endeavour always to do those things which

which are well pleafing in the fight of God, through the whole course of our lives, as he always pleased his Father, by doing all things conformable to his will — We must never wilfully transgress the laws of rightcousness, or lay aside our pious resolutions of persisting in them, and complying with them, as we have time and opportunity to do; even as be Adsx. always went about doing good: He was holy 38. and rightcous in every act, as well as in the general tenor of his life. He did no sin, nei-1 Pet. il. ther was guile found in his mouth.

Thirdly, The application very readily occurs, That fince there is but one fure and certain way by which falvation may be gained, viz. by doing righteousness, let us never turn aside, nor permit our selves, by any wiles, to be diverted from proceeding constantly in this good way; let us persist, without any deviation, in this direct and safe road, which is the only path that leads to heaven; let us always be upon our guard, so as not to be deluded by those which I have mentioned, or any other deceitful methods which may endanger our salvation.

I WILL not dony, but that some of those things, which have been named as insufficient, may prove occasions, or the means, or instruments of true religion; but a man may be eminently zealous in all the articles noted in the second head of this discourse, and yet be found unrighteous, and in a state of condemnation. If we would not put a cheat

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Luke vi. 31. upon our selves, we must be careful always to

live righteoufly. And, wo seed to see

As righteousness, in the strict and limited sense of it, signifies that duty more especially which we owe to one another, and to Chap. ii. which faint fobn in this epiftle hath a particular regard; and above all things to that Chap. iii. most excellent and comprehensive virtue of 10, II. love and charity; let us fludy to behave our Chap. iv. felves towards our fellow-creatures, as be-8, 11, 12, comes us in our several capacities; and to keep us steady in these duties, let us always

have before our eyes that golden precept of Jam. ii. 8. the Gospel, to love our neighbour as our selves; to do always unto others, as we could reasonably wish, or expect that others, in the like

Matt. vii. circumstances, should do unto us. Abile gaut

LET us in all cases act agreeably to the relation we bear to others, and pay to all mankind whatfoever is due to them, either by the ties of nature, or the mutual obligations of fociety. Let us be true and just in all ourdealings; faithful to our friends; placable towards our enemies; liberal to the poor; compassionate towards the miserable; tender of the reputation of all men; grateful to our benefactors; and benevolent to all mankind; wishing, and acting, as occasion offers, for the universal good of all men; rejoicing at their prosperity; grieving for their afflictions; ready to afford them help and consolation; and as far as we are able, to support them under their calamities; to carry it with respect and decennonu

decency to our superiors; with affability to our equals; and with condescension to inferiors; to extol mens virtues, and to pass a very favourable judgment upon their failings and infirmities. These are the chief instances of doing righteously to our brethren, and are necessary to our justification before the righteous judge.

IF one did not daily see so much of it, we should wonder greatly, how rational creatures could ever go about to delude themselves by such vain and foolish methods, as have been thought of, and contrived to make void the obligations to a righteous and holy life.

THE Roman priests have shewn a great dexterity in contriving feveral methods of procuring wealth and power to themselves, and, as they pretend, salvation to their followers, without the trouble of doing righteoufness: Instead of this they persuade the people, that eternal happiness may be gained by some corporal penances, scourgings, pilgrimages, &c. or by what may be done by others for them, prayers, and intercessions of the saints, indulgences, and masses for their souls; and many frauds and follies, which it would be very tedious in this place to enumerate and expose, as 'tis unnecessary to those who have duly attended to what hath been faid and proved before.

THERE are also, amongst our selves, many things which men have substituted in the room of righteousness, and by which they

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cherish in their hearts false hopes of happiness, besides those which have been spoken to; such as priestly absolutions; the prayers of others for us in our last hours; death-bed forrow, falfly called repentance, and the like. And thus immortal happiness is set up in their imaginations at a very low price indeed; and it would be well for those who rely upon fuch kind of supplemental helps, if heaven could be purchased at those easy rates; but the misfortune of it is, such foolish bidders

are like to lose their bargain.

MEN are not so easily imposed upon in their temporal affairs: He whose heart is eagerly fet upon the honours, or profits, or pleasures of this mortal life, is not usually fo imprudent, as to take up with the most easy, and less chargeable methods of pursuing them, if he finds upon inquiry, that it is not very certain, or highly probable at the least, that they will prove successful in the iffue; no, he will rather be at greater pains, and more expence, in taking fuch measures, as he is sure will be more effectual. And.

ARE the transitory things of this life more worth our care than the joys of immortality, and eternal treasures in the heavens? If they are not, Why should we be so sedulous and wary in the means we use about obtaining them, and so very indolent about the other? Why fo easy to be cheated by vain and useless projects, which are, as wife,

Righteousness in order to Salvatur

and thinking, and impartial persons must

confess, uncertain at the very best ?

THE doing righteousnels, however absolutely 'tis required of us, yet upon the gracious terms of the Gospel, can never justly be accounted a very hard, or unreasonable injunction; for if a man fins through weakness, inadvertency, or furprize, contrary to his firm purposes of doing better, and the general course of his whole life, he may recover the favour of his God, by a hearty and fincere repentance. And if afterwards he is more careful of his conduct, abitaining always from the like iniquity, and practifing those virtues which are contrary thereunto. and persevering for the future in holiness and righteousness of life, he then returns truly and effectually to his former state, and becomes a just and righteous person.

LET us then examine the safety of our condition upon these principles; and then let us appeal only to the judgment of our own consciences, and trust to nothing else. Let us never build our hopes of safety upon the before mentioned, or any like deceitful methods of salvation; neither let us venture to acquiesce in other mens opinions of our

righteousness.

Our Apostle in this chapter, speaking of that good assurance men may have of their own safety and acceptance with God, says, not, if our friends, or others condemn us not, but more truly to the purpose, If our heart Ver. 21.

186 The indispensable Necessity, &c.

condema us not, then have we confidence to-

wards God.

By doing righteousness we may be fatisfied that we have the true and faving knowledge of God: Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. This li. 3. also is our evidence that we love the Lord our God; For this is the love of God, that we keep bis commandments. And moreover, by the same rule we may affure our selves, Pal. xi. 7. that we are beloved of God (The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold the upright) And finally, that we shall be for ever happy in his presence; for, if we have our fruits unto boliness, the end of it will be the inestimable blessing of everlasting life.

FINIS.

5 JY 61



